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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# John Henry O'Hara's View of the Upper Classes in Pennsylvania Between 1900 and 1930

by

© Pamela C. MacArthur

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

Department of History

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1986

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled John Henry O'Hara's View of the Upper Classes in Pennsylvania Between 1900 and 1930 submitted by Pamela C. MacArthur in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Supervisor

Morton L Ross

David L. Lightner

Date March 17th /86

# Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Mrs. Violette Theresa Beale-Edgley, of Windsor, Ontario. Her fondness for history and humanity in general spurred me on to take a closer look at the American aristocracy through John Henry O'Hara's eyes. Without my grandmother's genteel ways, this thesis would not have been possible.

# Abstract

This study focuses on John Henry O'Hara's view of the upper classes in Pottsville, Pennsylvania between 1900 and 1930. O'Hara not only examined the genteel side of its upper strata, but its sordid side as well. He peered beneath its refined exterior to come up with the shocking side of failure, pessimism, perversion, alcoholism, and suicide to ultimately conclude that the rich, truly, had an "Appointment in Samarra".

This study examines O'Hara's view of the geographical, social and historical setting of Pottsville, Pennsylvania and surrounding vicinity; defines his genteel upper class; elaborates upon the "private hells" of the elite, a theory discussed by E. Russell Carson; and looks at the critics' comments about O'Hara.

Historians have completely ignored O'Hara's view of the gentility in Pennsylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. To overlook O'Hara's work not only would omit an essential part of the American cultural and historical heritage, but it would disregard John Henry O'Hara as a social historian on twentieth century America. Hence, an incomplete view of this upper strata in Pennsylvania would be the consequence.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to especially thank my advisor, Dr. Burton Smith for his patience, constructive criticism, and continuous moral support and encouragement throughout the M.A. programme; John O'Hara's brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Martin O'Hara (Pottsville, Pennsylvania), who confirmed my beliefs about O'Hara's accuracy; Professor Charles Mann, Curator of Rare Books (and keeper of the John O'Hara Papers) and his staff at the Pennsylvania State University Library, for assisting me with my research; Eli Brooks, my typist, who gave me the encouragement and moral support to continue writing after my teaching day was done; my colleague, Mrs. Shirley S. Ayer, who kindly loaned me her office during the evenings and on the weekends; and my darling sister, Nancy E. Karvellas, who was always there when the going got rough.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

John Henry O'Hara, the American author from Pottsville, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, put his homestate under a microscope and accurately reported its upper class strata's most intimate aspects from 1900 to 1930. He recorded the facts so well in his novels that his vision captured not only the upper class's genteel ways, but its startling side of failure, pessimism, alcoholism, perversion, suicide and loneliness. His view of Pottsville (Gibbsville) was so damning in his book Appointment in Samarra in 1934 that it is only now that John O'Hara's name is spoken throughout Schuylkill County. His shocking exposé of his native town conjured up feelings of resentment and hatred from its upper strata, while from its lower echelons of class distinction sometimes "a smile" could be seen.

O'Hara, the boy known for his shyness and arrogance during his teens, woke up the town of Pottsville, Pennsylvania in 1934.[1] Since then there have been mixed feelings about John Henry O'Hara, "the Irish Doctor's son". Some people were impressed by his style of living and fund of knowledge while others resented his assumption of superiority during his college years.[2] O'Hara assumed the air of a Yale man with all its power, privilege and fashion before he even began prep school. "It was the best, and John was a boy who believed in the difference between first class and no class."[3] But, no matter how he tried to win the approval of the town during his youth, he was still considered a middle-class Irish Catholic who drank and could not hold any steady employment after his dismissal from three prep schools. Consequently, John O'Hara with his smugness and sense of rebelliousness had to prove himself to the residents of Pottsville, for instance, his girlfriend Margaretta Archbald's father, Colonel James Archbald. By the late 1920's, O'Hara had a marred reputation:

> "dirty neck and dirty mouth O'Hara":
> "Dr. O'Hara's good-for-nothing kid, the one that got thrown out of all the schools".[4]

He knew that he was at the end of the line.[5]

He had to leave Pottsville to find a sense of worth and to, at least, prove to the town that he was going to be a "somebody". In 1927, he wrote to his friend, Bob Simonds:

> I simply must get out of Pottsville or I'll buy a gun and use it. Yes, it's come to that. I've never been so unhappy, so little enthusiastic about life, and it's all the fault of this place, and of myself. If I had some objective, something tangible to look forward to, it wouldn't be quite so lethal, but as is -[6]

From this point on, O'Hara was determined to do something with his life. But, when he did, he analyzed the most guarded characteristics of his hometown's upper crust and put his analysis in the scandalous novel Appointment in Samarra. Yes, he became famous, but lurking behind O'Hara's fame as an author, was his own "private hell" - the condemnation from Pottsville for exposing its genteel strata's darkest secrets.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that the critic Lionel Trilling in his review of the novel Pipe Night in 1939 rather influenced and encouraged O'Hara to portray his outlook of the upper classes in the novel form. Trilling concluded:

> The novel was invented, one might say, to deal with just the matter that O'Hara loves. Snobbery, vulgarity, the shades of social status and pretension, the addiction to objects of luxury, the innumerable social uncertainties, the comic juxtaposition of social assumptions - the novel thrives on them, and best knows how to deal with them.[7]

Coincidently, O'Hara had the ambition to write novels about a city that is "just short of New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia or Boston".[8] He was spurred on to higher heights by Lionel Trilling's praise to describe such cities as Lykens (Lyons), Harrisburg (Fort Penn), Pottsville (Gibbsville), Tamaqua (Taqua), and Pine Grove (Richterville) in his Pennsylvania novels. Without preaching any political or social theories, he recorded reality and conveyed the attitudes of the age. His biographer, Frank MacShane commented: "In the tradition of such writers as Dickens, Trollope, Tolstoy and Balzac, O'Hara wished to give a picture of upper-class social life as well as the commercial world on which it [was] based". Accordingly, he wanted to analyze an eastern, provincial region of the United States and relate the private lives of American men and women "and to say things about the relations between men and women that no one had ever said before".[9] O'Hara hoped that people would say: "That's how it was".[10]

Certain critics have described John O'Hara as a "social historian", but he clearly stated his position about this label:

> From Harriet Beecher Stowe to John Steinbeck the author who offers social history is most effective[,] perhaps even only effective, when his concern is for his characters rather than for his conditions. The difference between a novel about sharecroppers and a novel about Ezra Bumpkin, sharecropper, is the difference between a social-history report on the one hand and on the other, Art. The novelist ought to be, must be, on the side of Art. If he writes as a social historian first, I even doubt that his social history will be much good, since his understanding of, let us say, the sharecroppers' conditions is limited by his observations of the general and his remoteness from the particular.[11]

When he won the National Book Award for his novel Ten North Frederick in 1956, he expounded upon this earnest desire to portray the truth or social history. He felt that he "told as honestly as [he] could what [he had] seen, heard, thought, and felt about a great many of the men and women who populate this country".[12] In 1960, he wrote in his preface to the book Sermons and Soda Water that he did not want to leave the story of the Twenties, the Thirties, and the Forties to historians and editors of picture books but instead he want "to record the way people talked and thought and felt, and to do it with complete honesty and variety".[13]

By 1963, his preoccupation with winning the Nobel Prize and his consciousness of history was summed up in this statement written to his daughter, Wylie:

> If I live and keep on doing what I am trying to do, I really think I will get it. Why? Because after 1948 I had sense enough to take a look at my work as a body of work, and to look at my future. It did not happen overnight, but I came to realize that if I was going to leave a real, lasting mark, I could not do it with individual, isolated books. They all had to have a continuity, a theme, a purpose. And so I wrote with a consciousness of the historical-social values that are found in the work of all the important novelists. And if I win it it will be at least partly, by default, because the other major American novelists either have no big sense of history or they confuse history-sociology with propaganda.[14]

O'Hara, with his keen ability for observation, his so-called tape recorder ear for dialogue, immersed himself into the American scene and the very lives of his American characters. Richard Rhodes in a Sunday Times review agreed. "O'Hara is our data bank, our library, our ultimate resource". Rhodes felt that O'Hara's novel Lovey Childs: A Philadelphian's Story (1969) should be included in the "thousands [of pages] O'Hara had already written, --- a huge body of work about the remembered past".[15]

No matter how his critics viewed him, O'Hara relied on external details or facts that were related to status, class, or power. But he was aware that these facts were "merely

---

the external signs of an inner disquiet".[16] O'Hara had the understanding and compassion to delve into the inner lives of the American Rich "that other writers fudged through ignorance or covered up through gentility".[17] He knew that beneath the luxuries of Pierce Arrows, Buicks and Franklins, they had "their own private hells".[18]

Whether it be Ada Ewing's or Edith Chapin's internal conflict about lesbianism or Robert Millhouser's numbness about the murder of his wife, or Julian English's alcoholic tendencies, O'Hara was able to enter into the minds of the rich and understand their problems. He had the sensitivity to take a glimpse into their lives and record them in an objective fashion. He understood the "aristocrats' distorted views of themselves".[19] He bluntly expressed his feelings about the rich: He felt that the aristocracy was crumbling -- there was no future for this elite group.[20] He was aware of other authors' erroneous impressions of the rich, for he asserted: "I seem to be the only American author who gets around in these circles and over the years has observed the people in them".[21] In other words, O'Hara had access to the upper classes in the United States and was able to determine the sufferings of the rich beneath their airs of snobbery and good manners. John O'Hara knew the unpleasantness incorporated in this upper class. His intuition, sensitivity, and intellect told him of it.

John O'Hara was so accurate in his psychological assessment of his characters that Dr. Nathan Brandon in the field of psychotherapy claimed that O'Hara "never [made] a mistake about the psychological treatment of [his] characters".[22] In an interview, O'Hara's brother, Martin O'Hara said that "his books are absolutely accurate".[23]

Professor Charles Mann of Pennsylvania State University called O'Hara's writing "Dreiserian descriptiveness". The critic Lionel Trilling referred to O'Hara's "passion for accuracy" which in turn, led to his creation of The Region.[24] Charles Mann graphically defined The Region: "The Region O'Hara created in his novels is known as just that to anyone who lives or was born between the Susquehanna and the Delaware between Tamaqua and Harrisburg". The Region is anthracite coal country "... within a thirty-mile radius of Pottsville".[25] O'Hara "captured and preserved the sense of place associated with The Region in a way that is beyond the means of any historical commission".[26] He was a sculptor who "gave order to the chaos, the horror, the ugliness and the beauty, and brought The Region to life in Art".[27] O'Hara's craftsmanship left The Region's mark permanently in literature. It is no wonder that Cleanth Brooks, R.W.B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren have mentioned that The Region is commonly known as 'O'Hara Country' and all of them have remarked: "It is no small achievement to have brought a region so fully to life that it is named after one".[28]

Matthew J. Bruccoli stated that O'Hara's years in The Region culminated in "The writer and his material coalesc[ing] in Pottsville, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, between 1905 and 1928".[29] According to Charles W. Bassett in his article, "John O'Hara -- Irishman and American", O'Hara "translated the history and geography of Pennsylvania's Anthracite coal region into raw materials for his fiction", whereas John Lewis Cobbs, in his dissertation "The Pennsylvania Novels of John O'Hara", concluded that "The author's bleak vision had its roots in the rigid social structure of the coal region".[30]

O'Hara was able to capture the very essence of the upper classes in Pennsylvania between 1900 and 1930. Charles Mann noted: "The man who spent the greater part of his life in Hollywood, New York, and Princeton, with significant and steady stops in London, remained a regional writer concerned with a place almost elementally a region".[31] With O'Hara carving The Region into a geographical, and historical entity in his novels, he was able to deduce from this material his characters that could only use dialogue that was appropriate to their class, status, power, educational, familial, and social background. O'Hara realized that the spoken word is difficult to duplicate, but he "contrived a controlled impression of the vocabulary, grammar, and patterns".[32] Nevertheless, social details which were significant to O'Hara were connected to details of speech. If erroneous details were recorded, it was deliberate on the part of O'Hara. "Wherein he has taken liberties with the facts -- liberties which sometimes help to give truth to fiction as in the novel Ten North Frederick".[33]

Even though O'Hara utilized historical errors, "O'Hara expects a good reader to recognize that there is something vulgar or fraudulent about a character who wears a miniature hunting horn instead of a collar pin with business clothes"----[34] O'Hara stated that his details of social verisimilitude were "artificial", but as mentioned previously, his characters were psychologically true. His characters were true to their real-life models. In other words, Matthew Bruccoli expounded: "The lives must be true, and the life must be true; but both do not come from the same source". For instance, Julian English in

Appointment in Samarra was a man from the wrong side of the tracks who shot himself.

O'Hara claimed:

> I took his life, his psychological pattern and covered him up in Brooks shirts and a Cadillac dealership and so on, and the reason the story rings so true is that it is God's truth, out of life.[35]

According to Matthew Bruccoli,

> John O'Hara made his characters convincing through social realism -- which is what he insisted in the Rider Lectures. He wrote mostly about the rich - not because they are different -- but because they have more money and therefore live more socially complicated lives. Social stratification and the appurtenances thereof provided John O'Hara's best material.---[36]

O'Hara decidedly presented and portrayed on paper the Anthracite Coal Region and its people in a meticulous, and careful fashion. According to Charles Mann, "John O'Hara invented his own Pennsylvania, and by extension, his own America", but his environment

> ...leaned heavily upon verisimilitude and accuracy, for he was to place within it characters who sense every inch of its brick and asphalt, characters who were ruled by a kind of predestination which the environment relentlessly imposed upon them. So much that only sex and drink might sway them from a pre-ordained path.[37]

Nevertheless,

> O'Hara had a diagnostic framework for any American situation, a framework in which he placed his ambitious novels and which decades of prosperity, and cosmopolitan living could not dim: Gibbsville (Pottsville) for him was no less than the human condition.[38]

O'Hara's World or Country or The Region, along with its upper classes deserves consideration. Accordingly, this study will attempt to portray the upper classes with their idiosyncrasies as John Henry O'Hara saw them in Pennsylvanian society between 1900 and 1930.

It will not just look at the strata's refined, well-mannered aristocratic ways, but, will glimpse into the "other side" of the very genteel of Pennsylvania to find that the rich themselves also had a "private hell", and disappointments which included failure, pessimism, perversion, suicide, alcoholism and loneliness. It will judiciously attempt to portray that they, too, had an "Appointment in Samarra".

## Footnotes

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9 Ibid., p. 169.

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11 Ibid., p. 170.

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13 Sermons and Soda-Water, preface, p. X, cited by Frank MacShane, The Life of John O'Hara (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), p. 201.

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24 Thomas Patrick Coakley, "'O'Hara Country' Revisited: A Study of Regionalism, Theme and Point of View In The Work of John O'Hara" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1983), p. 23.

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29 Ibid., p. 24.

30 Ibid., p. 3.

31 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

32 Matthew Bruccoli speech on "O'Hara's Social Realism", filed at Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania, p. 9.

33 Charles Mann, "John O'Hara: Pennsylvania Novelist", John O'Hara Journal, 2 (Summer, 1980), (Filed at Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania), p. 7.

34 Matthew Bruccoli speech on "O'Hara's Social Realism", p. 10.

35 Ibid., pp. 7 - 8.

36 Ibid., p. 14.

37 Mann, pp. 6-7.

38 John Updike, review of Selected Letters of John O'Hara, edited by M.J. Bruccoli, in The New Yorker, 6 November 1978, John O'Hara Files, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania, p. 207.

# CHAPTER 2

## John Henry O'Hara: Geographer and Historian?

John Henry O'Hara with the "photographic precision of the still-life painter" examined Pottsville, Pennsylvania, street by street, and related its very essence. Whether it be the recording of the "minutiae of ordinary experience", the social history or the geographical layout of Pottsville, O'Hara's graphic analysis of Pottsville either "creat[ed] atmosphere, or [lent] credence to a character's motivation (in terms of either class consciousness or individual psychology), or simply [reported] it for its own sake and interest".[1]

O'Hara's novels, particularly Appointment in Samarra and Ten North Frederick, explicitly told the story of Pottsville, (Gibbsville), Pennsylvania. "....His faithfulness to detail carr[ied] down, to streets, houses, hotels, courthouses, whorehouses, and, in the minds of some Pottsville old-timers, people". In fact, he exposed people so well in his publication of Appointment in Samarra in 1934 that the upper crust of Pottsville could not make an unbiased judgment of its literary merit. The average Pottsvillian claimed that he could identify various incidents that Julian English, the protagonist in Appointment in Samarra told: for example, the mischievous pranks that people in the country club had played. People were greatly disturbed with the insights that O'Hara recorded. What really bothered Pottsvillians was O'Hara's "inclination to bestow upon his characters a rich, sexual instinct", along with a trait of violence. For instance,

> ...it didn't sit too well when O'Hara would picture a character with a physical resemblance to, say, a prominent Pottsville lawyer, and then have the guy messing around with his daughter's girlfriend.[2]

Even though certain Pottsvillians, for example, Frederick Hobbs, state senator felt O'Hara "made-up" his characters, Bernard McCormick was confident that the character Jim Malloy was John O'Hara and "when O'Hara [was] writing about Malloy that his fictional terrain most closely parallel[ed] Pottsville". If the character Malloy mentioned that he went drinking at an out-of-the-way roadhouse during prohibition, you can be certain that such a tavern "exists, or existed near Pottsville". No matter if one considers O'Hara's characters fictional or not, Pottsville simply does not completely accept O'Hara's view of the town. "If O'Hara had let the similarity between his fiction and the real Schuylkill County drop at simple renaming, he might be a more loved figure there than he is to-day". Bernard McCormick emphatically stated:

> But no American writer and possibly none in the world have focussed in such detail over so long a career and in so many stories on a town as microscopic as Pottsville. None have subjected the geography, sociology, and history of a place to such rigid and continuing scrutiny.

Whether it be geographically, historically or socially, O'Hara painted a clear picture of Pottsville, Pennsylvania and surrounding vicinity.[3]

In the third chapter of Appointment in Samarra, O'Hara described the geographical, historical, economic and geological position of Gibbsville (Pottsville) and, in essence, The Region in 1930. He explained that the anthracite region was located between Scranton on the north and Gibbsville on the south and that Gibbsville's earliest settlement was founded on Point Mountain (Sharp Mountain) where Gibbsville Conglomerate, a stone formation, was situated. Nature worked in mysterious ways. A geological squeeze or something similar happened, and then coal was produced. To this day, coal is found on the north side of the mountain, and not on the south and Gibbsville Conglomerate is on the eastern slope of the mountain. Basically, the richest veins of anthracite in the world are within a thirty mile radius of Gibbsville. In the 1920's and 1930's when the coal was being mined, Gibbsville flourished. When the mines remained dormant, Gibbsville became hard pressed.[4] But, O'Hara did not stop here with his description of The Region and Gibbsville. In From the Terrace he portrayed the violence, the fear, the beauty and the pride of life in The Region via the character Ralph Benziger. Ralph Benziger tried to "describe" The Region as he stood in his Mountain City (Frackville) yard:

> We live closer to the basic instincts than you might think. Down there, you cant see it now under this poor light, but at the end of this street last winter they found a man frozen to death. You dont think of this part of the country being cold, but we have readings of fifteen, eighteen, twenty below. And you get off a road less than a mile from this house and you're in scrub oak that all looks the same, and even people that were born here have been frozen to death. They start home a little drunk. In the summer, they fall down an air shaft. Get bitten by a rattlesnake. Drown in a dam. Not as bad as it used to be, but payday we still have a shooting or a knifing about once a month, a little oftener. And yet I have to say that I love it. I wouldnt live anywhere else if you paid me. When these mountains around here are covered with laurel, or even snow-, there's something so beautiful about them, and to me, knowing them from the inside, having spent so many years in the coal-black insides of these mountains, with just a carbide lamp that only makes you realize the blackness of it, and the danger, always there, gas that you cant smell but that can kill you, and the coal

> above you and on all sides of you that can crush you. And the people. The men, their women. The Irish faces, especially of the old Irish men. The old ones, not the young. Dignity. Wisdom. Sorrow, and pride. Not much time left to them, and not much to show for working like niggers all their lives. But have a look at their skin sometime. Go to a saloon and look at them. You know miners are the cleanest laborers there are. They scrub every evening and every Saturday they shave. You'll see an old man in his seventies or eighties and he'll have the skin of a young girl but with a light in it that isn't a greasy shine. And the Polacks. The schwakies [sic]. I go to one of our collieries in the early morning, before they get the coal dust on their faces, and they get in the cage, and I look at their faces and I can almost see them back on the steppes of Russia, not working in the mines, but riding horses with their swords swinging around and the reins in their teeth. Cossacks. Men who fight with knives. Wild men.[5]

Obviously, both Ralph Benziger and O'Hara knew The Region "from the inside", but one of the characters in The Lockwood Concern only considered it as an outsider: ..."those hideous coal mines. Those mountains of coal dust and those shabby little villages, and the gouges in the land".[6] But, O'Hara in his portrayal of The Region zoned in on his beloved Gibbsville in From the Terrace:

> Gibbsville was reachable by highway, railway, and the canal, but these transportation lines had been cut through a dense forest; snake, panther, and wildcat country, and on occasion bear. Strange men, of whom no questions were asked, went from town to town, and those floaters were quite sensibly blamed for the frequent highway robberies and senseless killings that occurred in the area.[7]

O'Hara defined The Region's parameters in quite a distinct fashion. We know that Schuylkill County is Lantenengo County; Pottsville, the county centre is Gibbsville; Schuylkill Haven is Swedish Haven (claimed not to be in The Region)[8]; Minersville is Collieryville; Tamaqua is Taqua; Lykens is Lyons; Red Lion, fifteen miles west of Pottsville is Richterville, named after writer Conrad Richter; Cressona is Fairgrounds (Schuylkill County Fairgrounds used to be located in Cressona),[9] Harrisburg is Fort Penn (debated if in The Region or not)[10] and Port Carbon is Port Johnson; the Schuylkill Country Club is the Lantenengo Country Club. Within Gibbsville, itself, John O'Hara's Christiana Street is Norwegian Street; Lantenengo Street is Mahantongo Street; North Frederick Street is North George Street, and Railroad Avenue is Railroad Avenue, and the exclusive Gibbsville Club was the Pottsville Club (burnt down in 1974). In his novel, A Rage to Live, John O'Hara, in a note, substituted the name Fort Penn for Harrisburg; Nesquehela for Dauphin County, and Nesquehela for the Susquehanna River. Thus, O'Hara created his own world and throughout his fiction he worked specifically within its rigid boundaries.[11]

Within O'Hara's geographical framework, he lucidly depicted the upper class families' geographic position in the various towns or cities that he wrote about. For example, in Gibbsville, O'Hara was able to graphically report the social standing of various families by their geographic location in the city of Gibbsville. In the novel Ten North Frederick, O'Hara carefully detailed the geography and history of North Frederick Street along with the occupational status of each of its occupants. (North George Street, Pottsville.) O'Hara described the length of the street from the Chapins' residence at 10 North Frederick Street to the Johnsons' rented house at Number 107 as less than a block. He noted that at one time the Johnsons home used to be known as the Lawrence property and then the Reifsnyders'. After that, various clergymen, educators, and engineers with their families rented it from the Lutheran church until the Johnsons' occupied it. Within this block, various types of occupants lived, for instance, anything from a railroad engineer, two railroad firemen, a young chiropractor, a Civil War veteran and his maiden nieces to a freight clerk for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Most of the people were married and took in roomers, who were usually screened. In appearance, this 100 block became very steep after the Chapins' house. Consequently, the adults had to park their cars turned toward the curb. But, the positive side was that the children had a hill for coasting during the long winters.[12]

O'Hara realistically described the social significance of North Frederick Street at the turn of the century. O'Hara claimed that the old-rich and "the others" lived on North Frederick Street which was located on the east side of the railroad tracks near the ugly railroad district. But, as long as a Chapin lived on Frederick Street, the expression "the wrong side of the tracks" was meaningless in Gibbsville for "the wrong side was much righter than the opposite side". If someone from North Frederick Street had had a so-called engagement, or banker's or doctor's appointment, he had to walk through the tough, railroad station area where thieves, procurers, whores and hoodlums hung out. O'Hara pointed out that the intersection of Christiana (Norwegian) Street and Railroad Avenue near 10 North Frederick Street at that time was considered the local capital of crime and violence.[13]

Even though O'Hara gave the example of the wealthy Benjamin Chapin family of 10 North Frederick Street, O'Hara in his fiction "fooled" the general reader. The Chapin family had a resemblance to a renowned family of Pottsville, but the dwelling was not located at 10 North George Street (North Frederick Street). According to Martin O'Hara (John

O'Hara's brother) the lot represented at 10 North Frederick Street was a vacant lot in 1909, and even today still remains vacant. But, O'Hara's description of the Chapin family and home quite distinctly expressed the standards and expectations of a wealthy family on North Frederick Street:

> The Benjamin Chapins were one such family. They lived within their income, they bought only the best, and they bought to last. They ordered the more expensive cuts of meat, but they watched their butcher bills and they would hold up payment over a single lamb chop. In their home was a kind of restfulness; all that was needed was there, and nothing would be changed and no additions made unless the change or addition was required for permanent improvement. The lighting fixtures had been installed for gas; when electricity was decided upon, the fixtures were converted, not taken down. Every room in the Frederick Street house was given a good cleaning once a week, and repairs were made promptly and by men and women with special skills. When something went wrong it was rectified before it got worse, whether it was a broken breeching strap or a brick in the sidewalk. Woodwork, furniture, silverware and brasses were worn smooth in the Chapin household and everything was always in its place because its place had been carefully decided upon at the very beginning. The Benjamin Chapins made no compromise with taste as they felt it or quality as they understood it. With those principles to guide them, they also privately believed, privately but firmly, that the very fact that an object was owned by them made it all right, good enough for anyone and too good for most.
>
> For the Benjamin Chapins were convinced of their own superiority, and when they compared themselves with other Gibbsville couples they always were able to reaffirm their self-appraisal.[14]

As one can see, economically these aristocratic families, "always [bought] the best. There's almost no such thing as a bargain".[15] Thus, O'Hara carefully defined the rich in Gibbsville with his example of Benjamin Chapin and his son, Joseph Chapin:

> There are the luxuries that the rich can afford, and there are the simplicities that the rich can afford if they are the kind of rich who are sure of themselves. The unsure rich buy the luxuries that the sure-of-themselves can do without. When Joe Chapin bought a Dodge for use on the farm he bought a sturdy, inexpensive, hard-riding, economical clean-lined car. It was what he needed, and it was not a Marmon or a Mercer - or a Ford. It was a car with a tricky gear shift, different from the standard shift and the Buick shift. And because Joe Chapin had bought a Dodge, a lot of people bought Dodges who had the money to buy Lincolns. If it was good enough for Joe Chapin ... He still had the Dodge in 1928, when he and Edith made a kind of "Dodge" decision.[16]

O'Hara knew exactly where the Old and New Wealth lived in Gibbsville in 1909, 1920 and in the 1930's. The Old Wealth resided on South Main and North Frederick in 1909 (South Centre and North George Street, Pottsville). But, by the twenties, the New Wealth and the children of the Old Wealth were moving westward to the "Roads", "Places", "Drives" and Lantenengo Street (Mahantongo Street) or the West side of Gibbsville. Lantenengo Street was attractive to the new generation. Only five or six houses on this street were older than the houses on South Main and Frederick. But, even as far back as

1909, people who were coming up in the town's business or social life went to Lantenengo Street and gave up their homes on Frederick or South Main. In 1890, the social outpost was 16th Street, and, by 1909, it was the 19th. A house built beyond 19th Street held no social prestige, for the Christiana Street neighbours built in the 1900-block or past it. It was certain that in the Twentieth Century, no one wanted to move to North Frederick Street and South Main. But, it was understood that Family Y living on North Frederick Street or South Main, belonged to the old and the rich of Gibbsville. Family X on Lantenengo were either an old Gibbsville family with money, or a Gibbsville family with new money.[17]

People such as Benjamin Chapin advised their son or sons to buy out on Lantenengo Street and to keep the property for a lifetime, but still hold on to their original family holdings. If they wanted to sell the family property, tear the house down. People such as Benjamin Chapin wanted their family home for future generations of their family, not the family of others.[18]

Throughout his novels, O'Hara looked at Gibbsville through a magnifying glass. He was able to clearly delineate points of class stratification. He was aware that the geographic location of a home was wrapped up with social and economic significance. Matthew Bruccoli claimed:

> It is impossible to determine how early John became aware of the elements of social stratification, but only a dull boy could have missed the neat geography of caste and class in Pottsville; Mahantongo (Lantenengo in Gibbsville) was the best street, with upper-middle class- and upper-class families. Norwegian Street (Christiana) one block away, was clearly middle- and lower-middle class; and everything on the other side of the tracks was unfashionable, except for part of North George Street (North Frederick). Indeed, there was even significance attached to where a family lived on Mahantongo.[19]

One's social and economic significance increased as one climbed the hill on Mahantongo Street.[20]

In Appointment in Samarra, O'Hara portrayed the social significance of Mahantongo (Lantenengo) and Norwegian (Christiana) Streets. He discussed how the young, rich boys on Lantenengo Street had to associate with the sons of the non-rich on Christiana Street in order to have a baseball game. One needed eighteen teammates and not even nine of them were the sons of the rich. O'Hara categorized the non-rich fathers' occupations from a butcher, a motorman, a "practical" surveyor (that is, a surveyor who had not gone to college), a freight clerk, two bookkeepers for the coal company, a Baptist minister, a neighbourhood saloonkeeper, a mechanic in a garage (which he called a garridge) to a perennial convict (who was up this time for stealing 100,000 cigarettes from the Gibbsville Tobacco Company).[21]

Historically, O'Hara understood the social and economic circumstances of the Gibbsville families in 1909 to 1930. In Ten North Frederick, O'Hara related the economic and social situation of the upper class families in 1909. In this year, families who had assets worth $800,000 lived in a luxurious manner without spending much more money than a family worth $200,000. These particular families did not publicly display the amount of wealth that they had accumulated. Nevertheless, there were a few families who lived in American luxury. They were affiliated with the coal lands, breweries, and meat-packing houses. They had the motor cars, the larger staff of servants, summer houses at distant resorts and were the leading contributors to church and charity. Their wealth was known and they enjoyed it. But, behind this strata were the well-off who had huge fortunes and who calmly ran the town.[22] But, by 1930, O'Hara revealed what happened to these same families of 1909. First of all, he pointed out that work in the mines near Gibbsville was on a three-day-a-week basis. He knew that after the 1925 strike, the oil burner replaced the smokeless anthracite coal. Thus, by 1929, "The anthracite industry was just about licked".[23]

Nevertheless, even though there were unfortunate circumstances occurring within the anthracite industry, many people in Gibbsville still had money in 1930. These people were the same families of 1909. The very rich continued to have money. But, the merchants, bankers, doctors, lawyers and dentists who played the stock market were spending their principal.[24] But, O'Hara also made reference to "a new and distinct kind of impoverished aristocracy ..." in the making during 1930 and 1931:

> Its members were those men and their families, who had made money in the stock market or through the general prosperity of the country in the latter half of the Twenties. They were quick aristocrats in the sense that their standing was based on recent dollars, but they were also quick to copy the spending habits (not yet the thrifty habits) of those families that had had money for more generations than could be measured by the new-rich in years. Moreover, the rich of the latter Twenties had so easily accustomed themselves to the tokens of wealth, and, when possible, the company of older money that they also learned how to spend with the same free gallantry, if not quite the grace, that had been acquired by the old-rich through several generations. And when the stockmarket ticker refused to answer their prayers they continued to spend and speculate until they had nothing left but their vote. With some misgiving, but hopefully, they gave or loaned their vote to the newer Mr. Roosevelt.[25]

In general, O'Hara summed up the historical picture of Gibbsville's wealthy families with Amy Johnson's conversation with her husband, W. Carl Johnson, the new Superintendent of Schools in Gibbsville in 1945:

> "I'm finding out about this town. It's a kind of a bastard town. Its supposed to be a coal town, or at least that's how it was always described for us. But you never see any miners on the streets".
>
> "It's a coal capital, like Scranton".
>
> "Yes. But so many of the so-called first families, they don't seem to have anything to do with coal. Some of them own farms, some own timber land. Small factories. The steel mill, Silk Mill. Shirt factories. It's a highly skilled town. The other day I saw a list of college graduates that live here, and there isn't a major college in the East or Middle West that wasn't represented - with one exception ...."
>
> "I couldn't find one graduate of Harvard College. Penn State leads, then Lehigh, because of so many men with engineering training, I guess. Then the University of Pennsylvania, then Yale, and after Yale I think Lafayette or Muhlenberg."[26]

Whether John O'Hara told of the various upper class families' geographic location on North Frederick Street or South Main or Lantenengo Street, or their specific role at the Lantenengo or Gibbsville Clubs, his sheer, uncanny perception treated the finer points of class stratification in a "meticulous, refined and precise" fashion.[27] For instance, he wrote about the exclusive membership in the Lantenengo Country Club (Schuylkill Country Club). Any member was allowed to come to the dance, but only a select few were welcome in the smoking room. Approximately twenty people were in this group, for example, The Whit Hoffmans, the Julian Englishes, the Froggy Ogdens, et cetera. These people were so wealthy and socially secure that they only had to answer to their own families if they committed a wrong. Your standing with the young generation of Gibbsville was judged by the easy manner in which you attained access to this group.[28] Not only did O'Hara define this group, but he was quite capable of placing an individual on a specific rung on the social ladder. He spoke of Harry Reilly who had made his way to the top by being a "good fellow" and by "being himself", and by the sheer power of wealth. Reilly was on the entertainment and greens committee. He could have a dance going until six o'clock in the morning by paying a big tip to the orchestra leader. But, he was still not an officer in the Gibbsville Assembly.[29]

In Appointment in Samarra, O'Hara cleverly delineated the two types of social snobbery that was prevalent in Gibbsville (Pottsville) in the 1930's. One was that of the "smoking room of the Lantenengo Country Club" and the other snobbery was the middle-class Pennsylvania Dutch populace of Gibbsville.[30]

With his apt skills of diagnosing the social framework of a particular town, O'Hara was conscious of a strict, rigid, social code throughout the upper strata in Gibbsville. He mentioned this when a judge was speaking to Joe Chapin's business partner, Arthur McHenry:

> The safest way to live is first, inherit money. Second, marry a woman that will co-operate with you in your sexual peculiarities. Third, have a legitimate job that keeps you busy. Fourth, be born without a taste for liquor. Fifth, join some big church. Sixth, don't live too long.[31]

But, O'Hara was aware of the fact that being from Gibbsville could actually limit one's station in life. Edward Carson, a critic, elaborated about this point:

> Social class is a determinant in the life of Joe Chapin; it prevents him from being able to live away from the restrictions of his milieu. For such a reason he cannot marry the woman of his choice [daughter's girlfriend]. Besides, Joe Chapin cannot scale the social ladder to a sufficiently high rung in order to enable him to overcome the "disgrace" of his beginnings....

O'Hara alluded to this in Ten North Frederick:

> ...On Joe's income [his family] could have travelled to the far places and seen the strange things, the lands and people that they knew through Stoddard's Lectures. But who in Shanghai, China would know that in Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., Joseph B. Chapin was an aristocrat of unassailable standing? If a Chinese prince were to come to Gibbsville, he would be entertained by the Chapins, but if the Chapins were visiting in Peking, would the reverse be true? Closer to home, to take up residence in Philadelphia or New York was not a prospect that attracted Edith. It would require much, much greater wealth than Joe possessed to get established in the big American cities. Joe could, of course, continue his legal career, but that was not to live as a retired gentleman.[32]

According to O'Hara, family background determined an individual's station in life. O'Hara emphasized his position about this matter:

> I do a lot of family tree stuff.... I put down in great detail such things as births, dates, marriages, and children. Some may be mentioned only once, but I'm a damn sight better off if I know all about them.

For instance, O'Hara related Katherine Doane Fliegler, the wife of Luther Fliegler (Julian English's business associate) family's background:

> Her family had been in Gibbsville a lot longer than the great majority of people who lived on Lantenengo Street. She was a Doane, and Grandfather Doane had been a drummer boy in the Mexican War and had a Congressional Medal of Honor from the Civil War. Grandfather Doane had been a member of the School Board for close to thirty years, before he died, and he was the only man in this part of the state who had a Congressional Medal of Honor.

This particular type of reference "reinforc[ed] a character's capacity to represent, through his actions and thoughts, his class origins". Hence, O'Hara objectively reported chronological material about his characters for it assessed the character's position on the social scale of Gibbsville and surrounding vicinity.[33]

O'Hara "with his wide angle lens on society"[34] simply stratified the Gibbsville society into six distinct orders in his novel *Appointment in Samarra*: Firstly, at the top were the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants of good family and old money who "[had] a social freedom and power that other classes lack[ed]".

> The Whit Hoffmans, the Julian Englishes, the Froggy Ogdens and so on. They were the spenders and drinkers and socially secure, who could thumb their noses and not have to answer to anyone but their own families.[35]

These people were enlisted in the prominent social institutions in Gibbsville. For example, Dr. William English (Julian's father)

> ... represented the best things in the community. He was a member of the County Medical Society, the Medieval Club of Philadelphia, the Gibbsville Chamber of Commerce, the Gibbsville Community Chest (director), the Children's Home Association (life subscriber), the Y.M.C.A. (director), the Lantenengo Historical Society, the Gibbsville Club (board of governors), the Gibbsville Assembly (membership committee), the Union League of Philadelphia, the Ancient and Arabic Order - Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, the Scottish Rite Masons (32 ), and the Liberty (formerly Germania), Hook and Ladder Company (1) (honorary). He also was a director of the Gibbsville National Bank and Trust Company, the Gibbsville Building and Loan Company, the Lantenengo Lumber Company, and the Gibbsville Tap and Reamer Company. Episcopalian, Republican.[36]

Also, the exclusive institution of The Second Thursdays was the most elitist of the social organizations in Gibbsville and the Englishes belonged to it. If one belonged to *that* institution, one obviously was crème de la crème.

Beneath this so-called power elite were various other categories. If one was a Catholic, for instance, Father Creedon, one could gain entry into all but the exclusive circles: "by virtue of money, family, or special status". Similarly, individuals such as Harry Reilly, an Irish-Catholic, were in the clubs, but could not enter the Gibbsville Assembly. He was considered a "parvenu by the Hoffmans and Englishes". People such as Lute Fliegler, WASP manager ~~of~~ Julian's Cadillac agency, were several cuts below Julian. They did not have the one commodity that was necessary to belong - OLD MONEY![37]

*Arriviste* Polish lawyers were another category. They were accepted into the Gibbsville Club, but Julian English indicated that they were far from gentry. Another division were the Jewish people who were considered "beyond the pale". "... a Gibbsville girl could marry anybody from out of town--anything so long as he was not a Jew".[38]

At the bottom of this array of classes were "the ethnic poor of the coal region". ---"the hunkies, the schwackies, the roundheaders, the broleys".[39]

Beneath this established social structure was the gangsters' strata represented by Ed Charney and Al Grecco. This strata only touched the other classes, for it was outside of the formal society of Gibbsville. Ed Charney brought Julian English and others of his class - liquor. This class had power for: "You either agreed with Ed between Reading and Wilkes - Barre, or you got a job in the mines".[40]

In A Rage to Live, O'Hara distinctly pointed out that it was "better to be Polish than Negro, Italian than Polish, Irish than Italian, and Pennsylvania Dutch than Irish". And with this ethnic origin, religion was "directly hinged": "the Irish were Catholics, the Pennsylvania Dutch were Lutherans of a sort, the Anglo-Saxons were Congregationalists or Episcopalians if they were anything." But, people such as the Caldwells, the crème de la crème of Fort Penn were non-denominational. (They were "the Stuyvesant Fishes or Astors, the Fort Penn 'crème de la crème'".) But, O'Hara explained that when one thought of Boston where "The Cabots [spoke] only to Lowells and the Lowells [spoke] only to God", he stated that Emily Caldwell thought herself "on very good terms with God".[41]

The Gibbsville hierarchy was rather fixed, but upward mobility was still possible even though it was slow. The Catholics, the Irish, the Poles, and the Wasps like the Flieglers had a chance to move up the scale. But, Gibbsville society still had "little room for human feeling or human failure".[42]

One realizes that "The upper class [could] do as it wish[ed] only in a very limited respect".... An example of this rigidness was when Mill Ammermann gave a big party each year in hope of finding a husband, but, "Whatever she did, Mill Ammermann must not give another large dress-up party for at least a year".[43]

If one did not observe the rules of etiquette in the lower classes, economic and social consequences arose:

> "Let Moskowitz have his revenge; Dr. English would have something to say hereafter about the deputy coronerships. Without that Moskowitz would not live".[44]

In the gangster strata, if one failed socially, the result was "Guess it'll be me or him", thought Al Grecco after an argument with Ed Charney. In polite gangster society, this type of behaviour was not condoned.[45]

It is obvious that John O'Hara understood the social stratification of Pottsville (Gibbsville) quite well and was overcome with detail about the habits and the customs of its rich. He discussed his viewpoint about this social situation in his book of essays, Sweet and Sour:

> The small town like my invention Gibbsville, has it all; the entrenched, the strivers, the climbers, the rebellious. But the big town, by which I mean the Boston - Providence - New York - Philadelphia - Wilmington - Baltimore groups, offers many more of the entrenched, the striving, the climbing and the rebelling to choose from ... [But] they both are tough to write about, or at least, they are to me .... I have abundant information on their habits and their tribal customs, but they interest me so much it's hard for me to know when to stop.[46]

Not only did O'Hara relay information about the geographic and social position of Gibbsville, but he avidly gave an historical account of the founding of Gibbsville in Appointment in Samarra:

> Adam English, one of his (William Dilworth English) ancestors, had come to Gibbsville in 1804, two years after Gibbsville was refounded.
>
> (Gibbsville was founded by Swedes in 1750, as nearly anyone could make out; the Swedes had been massacred by the Leni Lenape Indians, and the Swedish name of the original settlement has been lost.)[47]

or

> Gibbsville moved from the status of borough and became a third class city in 1911, but in 1930 the city still had less than 25,000 inhabitants (estimated 1930 population in the notebooks sent out by the Gibbsville banks to their depositors).[48]

It is a well-known fact that John Pott (Adam English) bought an iron furnace from Lewis Reese, Issac Thomas and Sarah Morris. The land that the furnace was on was called the Physic Tract. In addition, John Pott purchased the Mayfield, the Morefield and Zole Tracts. O'Hara was accurate about the 1804 date. The only problem that one has with his facts is the refounding date of Gibbsville in 1806. Neither the historians Joseph H. Zerbey or Joseph M. Hanney mentioned it in their accounts, but the book One Hundredth Anniversary of the County of Schuylkill, Pennsylvania - 1911 referred to the date 1806 when John Pott built a small iron furnace.[49]

According to Joseph Hanney, a present member of the Schuylkill County Historical Society, the Delaware or Schuylkill Indians or Lenni Lenape Indians, named by the French, lived in the Pottsville area (as John O'Hara cited). Supposedly, some historians claim that this was impossible for the area was a "Pine Swamp", but Hanney adamantly asserted only a small section of land in the southeast was marshy along the banks of the Norwegian

Creek. But, the eminent historian Hon. D.C. Hennings recorded in the 1890's his childhood recollections with "old-timers". The "old-timers" recalled seeing the crumbled foundations of a permanent Indian settlement in the area now lying between East Market and East Race Streets, on the west banks of the Norwegian Creek. Hanney noted that even the present day Charles Baber Cemetery was known as a camping site for the Indian.[50]

We understand through Hanney that by 1749, Lewis Evans and his surveyors visited the headwaters of the Schuylkill to draw a map to accompany the deed of the Indian purchase of 1749. At that time, Pottsville's description was stated as such:

> The site of Pottsville is a part of a segment of land, beginning at the southern base of the Blue Mountain proper, on the left bank of the Susquehanna River, at a point about five miles north of Harrisburg; thence north along the river to a point above the mouth of the Mahanoy Creek, at the base of Mahanoy Mountain; thence along that mountain northeastwardly to the right bank of the Delaware; thence along the Delaware River to the south base of the Blue Mountain River; thence along the southern base of the Blue Mountain proper to the Susquehanna River, the place of beginning. It includes parts of Dauphin and Northumberland Counties, a portion of Lebanon, all of Schuylkill, portions of Columbia, Luzerne and Lackawanna, all of Carbon and Pike, a portion of Lehigh and of probably one or two others. The consideration the Indians sold for was 500 pounds ($2,500) and some guns and some blankets.[51]

By 1751, a deed for this land purchase was granted by the Proprietaries of Pennsylvania.[52] This information substantiates O'Hara's approximate date of the first settlement in 1750.

There is no record of the Swedes being wiped out in Hanney's or Zerbey's accounts of Schuylkill County, but Hanney claimed that there were Dutch and Swedish settlements when he referred to the 1896 volumes entitled the Third Series of Pennsylvania Archives. But, he did indicate that the first residents, Henry Neiman and family who lived on what is now Mauch Chunk Street, "a little west of the hospital and near the King's Highway where it crossed the river" were massacred by Indians on Sunday, August 27th, 1780. Possibly, O'Hara was speaking about this family in Appointment in Samarra when he alluded to the fact that the Swedes were wiped out.[53]

O'Hara stated that Gibbsville became a third class city in 1911, and so did the Encyclopedia Britannica, 1957, but Joseph H. Zerbey maintained:

> The city charter passed on November 8, 1910, but because of legal difficulties, the city charter was not offically recognized by council until November 18, 1913 and the first city officials were sworn in on December 1st, 1913 ... Under city government, the mayor first received a salary of $1,500 per year.
>
> (By 1935, it had increased to $1,800.)
>
> The area of the city is 3.57 square miles. The length of opened streets is 41.7

miles and of unopened streets, 6.1 miles.[54]

Nevertheless, O'Hara still seemed to have a knack for accuracy. O'Hara pinpointed the census figure of 1930 to be under 25,000 people. Zerbey's census figure was 24,300 inhabitants. But, he recorded that the city's population by wards in 1930 was as follows: First, 2,143; second, 2,568; third, 3,444; fourth, 3,357; fifth, 6,037; sixth, 3,195, seventh, 3,532; total 24,276.[55] These figures still coincide with O'Hara's except in the beginning of Chapter seven in Appointment in Samarra he wrote that the 1930 census was 24,032.[56] No matter what, O'Hara was comparatively accurate.

Encyclopedia Britannica, 1957, documented the geographical, and historical aspects of Pottsville, Pennsylvania in a nutshell:

> Pottsville, a city of Pennsylvania, U.S., the county seat of Schuylkill County; on the Schuylkill River, 90 mi. NW of Philadelphia. It is served by the Lehigh Valley, the Reading and the Pennsylvania railways [now defunct]. The population in 1950 was 23,640; in 1940 it was 24,530 by the Federal Census. It has a picturesque location (627 ft above sea level) at the gap made by the river through Sharp Mountain and is in the midst of the southern ("Schuylkill") region of the anthracite coal field. Besides its large coal-mining interests, it has railroad shops and a variety of manufacturing industries, including textiles, aluminium and steel fabrication. The city operates under a commission form of government.
>
> The first white family that settled there was massacred by the Indians in August, 1780. Permanent settlement dates from about 1795, and soon after that an iron furnace was set up. In 1804 this furnace was bought by John Pott, founder of the borough. Coal was discovered in 1807.
>
> The town was laid out in 1816, incorporated as a borough in 1828, became the county seat in 1851 and was chartered as a city in 1911.[57]

In conclusion, O'Hara accurately portrayed the geo-social and historical setting of Pottsville, Pennsylvania and surrounding vicinity in his novels. With this town as his setting, O'Hara was able to grasp the very essence of the upper class families in The Region. The next chapter will examine the very manners, mores, wealth, fashion, taste, education, clubs, organizations, and family background of these families that have spurred O'Hara on to write about American life during the first thirty years of the twentieth century.

## Footnotes

1 E. Russell Carson, The Fiction of John O'Hara (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), pp. 2-3, 7.

2 Bernard McCormick, "A John O'Hara Geography," Journal of Modern Literature, 1 (1970): 151-168.

3 Ibid., pp. 152, 157, 159.

4 John O'Hara, Appointment in Samarra (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934, reprint ed., New York, N.Y.: Bantam, 1966), p. 49.

5 From the Terrace, p. 461, cited by Thomas Patrick Coakley, "'O'Hara Country' Revisited: A Study of Regionalism, Theme, and Point of View In The Work Of John O'Hara" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1983), pp. 59-60.

6 The Lockwood Concern, p. 353, cited by Thomas Patrick Coakley, "'O'Hara Country' Revisited: A Study of Regionalism, Theme, and Point of View In The Work Of John O'Hara". (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1983), pp. 59-60.

7 John O'Hara, From the Terrace (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 70.

8 Coakley, p. 18.

9 McCormick, p. 152.

10 Coakley, p. 21.

11 John O'Hara, A Rage to Live, (New York: Random House, 1949; reprint ed., New York,

NY.: Bantam, 1957), preface.

12 John O'Hara, Ten North Frederick (Toronto: Popular Library, 1955), pp. 52-53.

13 Ibid., p. 131.

14 Ibid., p. 120.

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# CHAPTER 3

## O'Hara's Genteel Upper Class of Pennsylvania

The American author, John Updike, in A History of Pennsylvania correctly described O'Hara as "phonophotographic" for he "had an unsurpassed eye for detail and an ear for dialogue". He claimed that O'Hara's details "caught the insignia of social station, ... the objects which fill or clutter our lives, and ... the clothes, cars, houses, which comprise the surface and much of the texture of American life". O'Hara with his never-ending interest in class distinction detected the very pulse of the Anthracite Region that stretched "in a triangle-shape from Philadelphia at its eastern extremity, Harrisburg at its western end, and Pottsville, Tamaqua, and Lykens forming its northern apex". "As Pottsville journalist and playboy, he became expert in the grimy anatomy of human transactions; the backrooms of bars and the upstairs of mansions held few secrets from him".[1]

O'Hara was quite aware that principles, or a set of mores, were ingrained in the upper classes. No matter what idiosyncrasies emerged within this particular group, one rule of thumb seemed to be the backbone of the strata. As Grace Tate uttered:

> I was in my place before I was born, and I'll live in it and die in it. This is where I belong, and I don't want to change myself because then I might not belong here.[2]

Certain principles, rules of conduct, or mores were found throughout the whole upper class strata, and this strata followed them. For example, Sidney Tate (who represented the crème de la crème) reiterated his beliefs to his wife, Grace:

> --- You see, in this world you learn a set of rules, or you don't learn them. But assuming you learn them, you stick by them. They may be no damn good, but you're who you are and why you are because they're your rules and you stick by them. And of course when it's easy to stick to them, that's no test. It's when it's hard to obey the rules, that's when they mean something. That's what I believe and I always thought you did too.[3]

These beliefs were the very essence of this upper class set. Sidney was such an honourable individual that he believed in honour, vows, promises and the Golden Rule.[4] O'Hara gave a number of examples of such people.

Joe Chapin, a prominent lawyer from Gibbsville, firmly believed that whatever imperfections he had were definitely less harmful than the imperfections of his lawyer friend, Paul Donaldson. Chapin felt that his particular class displayed impeccable manners in whatever situations they encountered.[5]

Alfred Eaton, a steel magnate in From The Terrace, had such integrity and lived so close to a rigid moral code that he would not give his mother gas ration coupons during the war when he had the opportunity to do so.[6] James Cobbs offered this statement about Alfred's values:

> Alfred's strength, his individualism, his great competence coupled with capacity for hard work, his instinctive sense of good taste and breeding, and finally his ethical sense which sees moral living as a matter of laying down certain laws and sticking tenaciously to them -- in all of these (not to mention his good looks and power with women) Alfred Eaton is the embodiment of the very highest values that his world holds.[7]

Another character, James D. MacHardie, who was an outstanding example of uprightness and refinement, had his principles and taste established in a rigid "social order based upon law and custom".[8] MacHardie's attitude toward divorce exemplified his own views on the world:

> Marriage is an institution based on what? Love? Not always. Lust? Sometimes, but not always. The raising of children? No, not always. Marriage is first of all an exchange of vows. A contract, Eaton. To me the sanctity of marriage means the sanctity of vows, the promises, the contract, the given word. I expect every man to honour my word; because I honour it. A business contract is only something that the lawyers write so that we'll know what is agreed to, what is covered. The real contract shouldn't even require signatures. It is the given word that matters.[9]

In the novel Elizabeth Appleton, Elizabeth Appleton lived by a code to keep her marriage intact: She felt that there was only one way to maintain one's marriage:

> ..."The only way you can be sure is if you make up your mind that you're going to stay married no matter what happens. Cruelty. Infidelity. Drinking. Tempermental differences".[10]

No matter what, her statement of conduct was permanently followed and suggested that that was the only way a Professor's wife should be in the public's eye.[11]

Regarding a code relating to marriage, we find that marriage was a social facade "important in society not so much for what it [was], but for what it appear[ed] to be".[12] O'Hara clearly illustrated this with the example of Percy Hasbrouch and his wife, Beulah, in his novel From the Terrace. Beulah was a humorless, well-bred woman who preferred to be her husband's sister after their first week of marriage. Instead, after forty years of coldly hating each other they still appeared as models of respectability.[13]

Politeness, respectability and a certain moral code were expected from upper class marriages. Hence, with Alfred Eaton and Mary if one lived in the manner such as they did, one was of polite society.[14]

However, in O'Hara's novels one explicit fact about marriage in the upper classes was emphasized: a double standard occurred. The upper class with its strict, rigid code of morality condoned men having extra-marital affairs, engaging in exploits with prostitutes, et cetera, but a woman could only have sexual relations with her husband; she must even be a virgin when she got married. In Ten North Frederick, Benjamin Chapin who no longer was able to have sex with his wife, Charlotte Chapin, visited whorehouses on Arch Street, Philadelphia for ten years and this was completely acceptable.[15] Edith Chapin, his daughter-in-law, realized the significance of virginity: "She was quite aware that men of her class expected the girls of her class to be virgins, and in most cases the expectation was justified".[16]

Apparently, men had various weaknesses, and these weaknesses had to be gratified: Mrs. Walker understood her daughter Caroline's predicament with Julian English (experience with a nightclub singer) and emphasized this advice:

> "Men are weak, darling. In the hands of a woman the strongest man in the world is weak, so don't think any the less of Julian or your father or any other man if he has a momentary weakness...."[17]

Women had to be "absolutely faithful", but men were accepted with their sexual idiosyncrasies.[18]

In Butterfield 8, Eddie, Gloria's platonic friend, confirmed the acceptance of men's extra-marital affairs and women's faithfulness. Eddie knew that the fathers of his friends were unfaithful to their wives. He knew that they were human and subject to desire. His own father taught him to accept their infidelity, but not his own. Yet, at the same time, Eddie wanted women to be faithful.[19] Alfred Eaton wanted to continue a physical relationship with his friend, Norma, while he was taking out the woman he loved: Victoria.[20] In Elizabeth Appleton, O'Hara brought up the double standard again when Barbara Speacht claimed "... I'm not blaming the men that were unfaithful. They couldn't help it, because they were men, and men are naturally promiscuous".[21]

Even though men were allowed to have extra-marital affairs in an upper class marriage, men had to control the urges of their wives. If there was a breach of contract, on the part of the woman, the husband was held responsible for this moral or social transgression. He was considered weak "to allow this thing to happen, this breach of good order".[22] In From the Terrace, this conduct was alluded to:

> ... An adulterous man and woman who obstinately divorced their wife and husband and went on to a marriage of their own were held in low esteem. They had violated good order. Even in the least scandalous of such developments the love-stricken pair had momentarily exposed the special small world to the attention of the outside world, and the high hedges and French fences that hid the big houses from the view of Lawrence Von Elm [a middle-class airplane designer] were only small evidences of the smaller world's passion for privacy. But it must not be thought that good order was the vocation of the women. It originated with and was enforced by the men".[23]

Women, in this particular milieu, had to adhere to a rigid standard and men had to maintain this status quo:

> A man who allowed an illicit love to jeopardize his marriage and thereby to disturb good order forfeited what privileges he had and was likely to obtain. A similar punishment awaited the cuckolded husband who took his nasty discovery into the courts. He, too, had violated good order. One effect of this uncompromising attitude toward divorce and scandal was that it ironically gave a sense of security to wives who contemplated or were indulging in extra-marital affairs. This effect was unknown to the keepers of good order, who were more likely to attribute adultery to the idleness and shallowness of the women under the system of good order. A man on his way up suffered his wife's infidelity rather than take public action that he knew would end his career and the women knew it and made use of the knowledge.[24]

If, for instance, the woman committed adultery, the husband believed it was his fault. For example, Sidney Tate was aware of Grace's affair with Roger Bannon and he felt that he had no right to beat Roger up and then get beaten himself. He had to be man enough to correct Grace's behavior and keep her at home.[25] Yet, at the same time, Sidney felt that no matter what his indiscretions were, he had to adhere to a strict moral code. With his sense of honour and his feeling of indignation toward Grace's indiscretions, he elaborated upon his position. He knew that he was the type of man that would never read another person's letter without permission, listen to a telephone conversation or eavesdrop outside one's door. But, he also realized that his marriage was "as low as it could get".[26]

The only time a man's sexual weaknesses were looked down upon was when an elderly man succumbed to a marriage with an extremely younger woman. For example, when 51-year old Robert Millhouser of Lyons, Pennsylvania married Hedda Steele, an 18 -

year old girl, both parties were looked upon as freaks in society.[27]

If these rigid moral codes were broken, the characters in John O'Hara's novels suffered horrible consequences. Norman Podhoretz pointed out that Gibbsville's people did not question the social values, for that was all they had. If they broke the rules of the Country Club, they felt that they deserved the punishment that awaited them. They knew, if they strayed from the established mores, they would be totally destroyed.[28]

Obviously, the ultimate goal in an upper class marriage was politeness, respectability, and the double standard under control: One world for the men and another for the women. Although men had their indiscretions, their aim was to marry a sophisticated, cultured and respectable woman such as Emily Liggett in the novel Butterfield 8. Emily's husband, Weston Liggett, an upper class businessman, examined his own wife's situation:

> Emily, he decided after eighteen years of marriage, was a type. And he knew why she was a type, or he knew the thing that made the difference in the look of a girl like Emily and the look of a girl like Gloria. Gloria led a certain kind of life, a sordid life; drinking and sleeping with men and God knows what all, and she had seen more of 'life' than Emily ever possibly would see. Whereas Emily had been brought up in a certain way, always accustomed to money and the good ways of spending it. In other words, all her life Emily had been looking at nice things, nice house(s), cars, pictures, grounds, clothes, people. Things that were easy to look at, and people that were easy to look at; with healthy complexions and good teeth, people who had had pasteurized milk to drink and proper food all their lives from the time they were infants; people who lived in houses that were kept clean, and painted when paint was needed, who took care of their cars and their furniture and their bodies, and by so doing their minds were taken care of; and they got the look that Emily and girls-women-like her had. Whereas Gloria ... had good teeth and a good complexion and a healthy body, but there was something wrong somewhere. She had not gone to the very best schools, for instance.[29]

Thus, the appearance of respectability was the ruling factor in an upper class marriage.

The Benjamin Chapin marriage was such a marriage. It "maintained the appearance of unity".[30] It appeared to be a "model marriage". Under this type of contract, certain types of behaviour were acceptable. For example,

> Under the unwritten rules of the time, Ben could have beaten and raped his wife with impunity; the screams of violently abused women were heard not only in the poorer districts of the town, where, to be sure, they were heard more frequently. But in accordance with the superiority they felt Ben and Charlotte Chapin adhered to the ladylike and gentlemanly code which regulated all social activity and personal behavior, even including, by extension, the act of procreation. A gentleman did not force his attentions on a lady; the lady protected the gentleman's pride by pleading a splitting headache or by telling him that it was her time of the month----
>
> They were living in a time when it was unthinkable for a woman of Charlotte's background to confide to another woman that her husband had seen her

> breasts. More explicit confidences were more unthinkable. An admission of sexual incompatibility was fantastically unlikely.
>
> And so, to all outward appearances, the successful marriage of the father and mother of Joe Chapin.[31]

Along with this definitive moral code whether it was pertaining to marriage, or just plain principles, and manners within upper class marriages, pressure was applied wherever necessary to curb gossip about a member of this strata. This clique protected their own, and their impeccable manners even protected their own individual selves. For instance, Betty Martindale decided to terminate any gossip about Grace Tate's affair with Roger Bannon:

> [This] had been a useful warning to Grace's friends, who had only to think twice to conjure up a situation in which the Caldwell - Tate - Schofstall - Bordner - Partridge - et--al. alliance could do them harm socially, financially, politically or all three.[32]

We can see with the Baum case in A Rage to Live that Emily Caldwell suggested to her husband, Will, to come to Baum's rescue. As Will cited:

> "If we belong to a clahss, or a class, it's not worth much if we don't come to the rescue when one of us gets in trouble".[33]

Edgar Martindale felt that the aristocracy of Fort Penn had to keep the lower classes in their place. Power or pressure from the upper classes was obviously necessary to keep order in their community:

> If Charlie Jay should win the election, with what he calls the common people versus the aristocracy, this town will go to hell so fast that we won't know what happened to us. The people aren't going to win anything. They'll lose. It's the people like Brock Caldwell and Mr. Partridge, and me in my small way, that keep the fear of God in those thieves, the organization. I don't say the respectable element are respectable out of lofty principle, but at least we don't countenance the kind of looting that'll go on if Charlie's elected in spite of us.[34]

No matter what type of pressure or censure was exerted, the rich took care of themselves. In Ourselves to Know we learn that Robert Millhouser, who murdered his wife, was treated very kindly in jail. People such as Brock Caldwell were able to bring about this result. "They had always known that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor, so there was nothing new about that".[35] Nevertheless, the rich protected themselves; certain principles or rules of conduct were condoned throughout this strata.

Benjamin Chapin summed up the manners of the wealthy when he spoke to his son, Joe, about Gibbsville:

> "What is there to tell" about Gibbsville Joe says to his father. "It's a small town in the Pennsylvania coal region. Not even as big as Scranton". "Not even as big

> as Wilkes-Barre, either. But not the *same* as Scranton, not the same as *Wilkes-Barre*".
>
> "If I started to expatiate on the glories of Gibbsville I'm afraid my audience would turn away".
>
> "Then I'm afraid I have a low opinion of their manners, a very low opinion indeed. And if all they're interested in is New York and Philadelphia and Boston, then I won't give them much credit for their intelligence. It isn't where a man comes from that counts...
>
> "Yes, but Father that's *my* point. Would you consider it polite if I were to bore my friends with a description of the town I happened to be born in?"
>
> "And your mother and I, both your grandfathers and both of your grandmothers, and *their* fathers and mothers".
>
> "But some of those New York people, and Boston, and Philadelphia, their families go back so far that I'd run out of greats".
>
> "Well, in my day they were ladies and gentlemen, and if they asked a man where he came from, they had the good manners to let him answer their question. And they might learn something into the bargain".
>
> "Well, I suppose I'll have to tutor in Gibbsvilliana. I'm not even sure of the population".
>
> "No, you won't have to tutor, but you might brush up on your own manners, starting with more respect for your father.---"[36]

With strict moral codes, principles, pressure and power, the upper classes could survive. The most telling note of elitist living in Gibbsville (Pottsville) was belonging to The Second Thursdays' dinners. This group "finally and ultimately possessed the greatest social power in Gibbsville".[37] The Second Thursdays was a club which was unknown to most of the public and even most of the members of the Assembly. Throughout its existence, it never had had a non-member guest; it had no charter, no constitution and by-laws, no rules, no officers, no dues (although assessments were permissible), no stationery, no headquarters, no waiting list other than the direct descendents of the original members. At their meetings, men were required to wear a two-inch-wide red ribbon diagonally across their starched shirt fronts and each of the women received a corsage. One did not discuss the existence of The Second Thursdays with its reputed membership. The Club roster was never printed or made public. Non-members tried to find out who was in the membership and this was to no avail. The memberships' secrecy was for a reason: they did not want to hurt the people that were not invited to the dinner parties. But, after a few years, the secrecy had two other purposes for being: It was fun, and "it was nobody's damn business".[38]

If one was excluded from this secret, exclusive club, the possiblity of finding out why would never come to the fore. For instance, Blanche Montgomery did not become a member of The Second Thursdays. She analyzed her own situation:

> Perhaps she had spent too much money on clothes? Perhaps she had flirted with someone's husband? Possibly they did not like the color she had chosen for the repainting of the old Montgomery mansion? She was fully aware of the enormity of her failure: not even being married to a Montgomery was enough to carry her, but being married to her was enough to hurt a Montgomery.[39]

O'Hara simply stated the repercussions of this exclusion as: The Montgomery's standing in Gibbsville was automatically lowered from one of a FIRST FAMILY to "just another old family with money". Now, their social indispensibility was terminated.[40] Along with the right social connections, social interaction, moral codes, principles, and good manners, impeccable taste was a desirable quality in the upper classes. A family such as the Chapins did not compromise with taste. If they owned an object, it was considered "good enough for anyone and too good for most".[41]

Along with good taste, money or wealth played an important role within O'Hara's world. The WASPS seemed to have the most and the ethnic labouring classes the least. In between, it was obvious that money did not necessarily go along with status, but remained an independent force.[42] One needed more than money to be included in the upper class. People such as Mrs. Shawse, the Jews, and Harry Reilly had plenty of it, but could only get so far in their social climbing. But the extraordinary realization was when Julian English "[found] that social rank in itself was not enough to save him from a slender bank balance".[43]

Position included money and power, but, power was achieved through money in Fort Penn. O'Hara noted in A Rage to Live that Caldwell money came from the land centuries before. The age and the size of the fortune determined how secure a family's social position was. In the case of the Caldwells, they were considered the top of the social pyramid and "their position was frozen".[44]

In dealing with the upper classes, money or wealth was definitely part and parcel of it. But, one understanding of this wealth was that it was not earned, but inherited. During Grace Tate's day, work was thought of as degrading. A man of good family either managed the family business, practiced law or medicine, or became a gentleman farmer.[45] Thus work was incidental. For instance, Robert Millhouser of Lyons who was similar to the

Caldwells of Fort Penn was "typical of the idle rich with great tolerance for idleness but little capacity for richness".[46] Alfred Eaton was typical of "the natural aristocracy of achievement", "one of those who gravitated toward the top by instinct".[47] He [Alfred Eaton] was not society like the Tates, Englishes, or Chapins, for according to Mary St. John's mother the Eatons were:

> "...nothing and nobody. The mother is a drunkard and other things besides, the father is a "noisy 'nouveau riche'" war profiteer."[48]

People such as Lex Porter, Lex's uncles Fritz and Alex Thornton, the Warren family, the Chapins, the Caldwells, the Millhousers, and the Tates were at the top of the social pyramid. Alfred Eaton was between the top and the bottom of the pyramid. He was a manipulator, not a creator of wealth, but he was not old money such as the Tates, Chapins, Caldwells, Millhousers, Warrens, Porters, or Thortons. At the bottom were individuals such as "Tom Rothermel, Jim Roper and Larry Von Elm, poor boys who [had] worked their way into the upper middle classes, at least financially."[49]

But, even though money had its sway, it was actually considered vulgar or common to speak about it in the families of the upper classes, for example, the Eatons, Chapins, Tates, and Caldwells, but it was a unifying topic in a family "on the way up":

> Money, as has already been shown, was not a lively topic of conversation in the Samuel Eaton family, as a topic it was considered to be in bad taste. At Jonas Rothermel's house it was unifying, like a common friend and a common enemy, an ambition and an elusive gain.[50]

But, as said before, power and money were linked. And with this power, secrecy and privacy had its place:

> The reward for accomplishment was more power, and as the power increased so did the desire for and desirability of privacy ... but they demanded obedience in all matters pertaining to their work, and since privacy was essential to their methods, the demand for privacy easily extended over matters not directly connected with their work.[51]

According to O'Hara, the upper classes during the Depression of the 1930's still had money. Their financial circumstances possibly had a cloud over them at times, but money was still around. For instance, Weston Liggett in Butterfield 8 was a New York branch manager for a heavy-tool manufacturing plant that his grandfather had founded as a tap and reamer plant. In 1929, in the stock market, Liggett made $75,000 and in 1930, $27,000. But his salary was $25,000, plus $40,000 in commissions. In addition, he received $5,000 from his mother's estate and $15,000 profit from Liggett and Company.

illegally, he received an additional $2,000 in 1930.[52]

In Appointment in Samarra, William Dilworth English, Julian's father, had a salary of $12,000 a year as chief of staff at the Gibbsville Hospital. From his private practice, he received $10,000. His wife, Elizabeth McHenry English, had an income of $6,000 in 1930. In all, $28,000 was the total income for the English family in 1930: "In other years it had been more than that, but Dr. English, in investing his wife's money, had been no wiser than a lot of other men whose wives had money to invest".[53] This family, at least, could still survive in considerably comfortable circumstances during an economic downturn. But their son, Julian, owner of the Gibbsville-Cadillac Motor Car Company needed to borrow $2,000 more from Harry Reilly in December, 1930, in order to live in circumstances that he was accustomed to.[54] In other words, the upper classes did not really suffer in the 1930's when compared to the average individual. On the whole, this strata lived with rather satisfying incomes during the Great Depression.

Along with principles, mores, power, good taste, and money, the upper classes had their badges, clubs, and organizations. John O'Hara knew the essential and prestigious clubs of Pottsville. In Ten North Frederick, he described the intricacies of the swank Gibbsville Club, The Lantenengo Country Club, and The Second Thursdays. If one wanted to belong to the Gibbsville Club, one could assume that:

> Almost any sufficiently solvent Christian man, who had made his money in a sanctioned enterprise and did not habitually leave his car parked in front of whorehouses, could be reasonably sure of election to the Gibbsville Club within two years of proposal and seconding.[55]

But, the Gibbsville Assembly held its own weight. One could belong to the Gibbsville Club, but not be a member of the Gibbsville Assembly. The Gibbsville Assembly had such clout and control that the invitation list of the Gibbsville Assembly was a ready-made list for the Lantenengo Country Club (seven miles out of Gibbsville).[56] If one stayed away from five consecutive Assemblies, one could be dropped from the list. But this rule was not applied, unless there was outrageous misconduct at or away from the Ball itself. Thus, it was a rare exception if one was not on the Assembly list and still a member of the Lantenengo Country Club.[57]

The Second Thursdays was the most elitest institution of all in Gibbsville. O'Hara understood the snobbery, the censure, the absolute preciseness of everything about The Second Thursdays. He was knowledgeable about its historical background, its substance, and membership. O'Hara discussed The Second Thursdays in the novel Ten North Frederick. He stated that in 1892, The Second Thursdays was started with a group consisting of twenty couples of congenial friends. But it would not matter if the club started in 1864, for the same substantial families would still be included. They were people such as the Englishes, the McHenrys and the Chapins. The only way the membership would be reduced in number would be by death. If a son was not produced in the family to carry on the father's membership, the family's membership was no longer valid. And, if for instance, Julian English was kept out or someone new was taken in, then "it's no longer The Second Thursdays". The club might as well disband. By 1920, The Second Thursdays was fewer in numbers, but old friends gathered in their best for good food and wine. At least the members could have a conversation without being overheard. It gave the members a feeling of importance for Joe Chapin told Edith, "We mean something in Gibbsville, besides meaning something to ourselves". This club was so informal that there was no clubhouse, no rooms, no place for a bulletin board, and no stationery. Its name was even The Second Thursdays, without the word club. It met only once a month: November, December, January, February and March.[31]

The Second Thursdays had a ritual that only The Second Thursdays could have and on Joe Chapin's automatic membership, O'Hara illustrated it well. At each meeting, there were always three toasts: to George Washington, to Abraham Lincoln, and to the President of the United States. The conversation was similar to any dinner party. During the evening, the name of the organization was never spoken. After dinner, the gentlemen and ladies separated for exactly thirty minutes. After their reunion, the host said a set speech. "Ladies and gentlemen. We are honoured by your presence in our house". Then, new members were welcomed if any, and a fee extracted from the membership if necessary to alleviate anyone in distress in their community. Then an announcement of where the next meeting would be held took place. The gentlemen discussed the business during the one half hour break and the ladies had no part in it. If one was elected to the membership, it was announced as such: "At our next meeting we will be joined by ..." and the names of the new members. A candidate was never blackballed; no one ever had refused to join the club, and not one of the members had ever had to resign for financial or other reasons. A host held a meeting at his house once every three years and could well afford it.[59]

In Joseph H. Zerbey's account of the Pottsville Club in the newspaper article "Pottsville Club Moved to New Home," he claimed that the club was initially formed in 1888 and met in the Morris Building; then the Loeser Building where the Chronicle Office stood; then the Whitney Building (property of the Pottsville Water Company and occupied by the Braun School of Music) (April 3rd, 1891) and then at 314 Mahantongo Street in 1933 (November 16th).[60]

In the beginning, ladies' nights with professional entertainment were in vogue; anniversary dinners were initiated in 1912, on February 22nd each year for three years; from 1888 to 1919, Open House was held on New Year's Day; the ballroom of the Club was used for wedding receptions and Assemblies, and dinners before those dances. Luncheons were served every noon with the exception of Sunday, and Saturday Night Smokers were popular. One rule was always adhered to: "No man under the age of twenty-five [could] join the club, and annual meetings with the election of officers [were] held each year".[61]

When the new Pottsville Club opened on 314 Mahantongo Street, the "Republican, - Morning Paper", November 17, 1933, announced its opening:

> A ladies reception given by the Pottsville Club in its new home on Mahantongo Street last night was the formal opening of the handsome quarters when a large representation of its members escorted wives, sisters, daughters, and sweethearts to one of the finest and best appointed club houses in this section of the state....
>
> "The ground floor or basement is occupied by the caretaker and his wife, on the first floor are the reception room, lounging room, billiard and game room, grill room and steward's room. The second floor is devoted to a library and reading room, a committee room and dining rooms while the new addition boasts of a fine dance hall. The third floor provides apartments for the bachelor members of the club".[62]

By the 1920's, the Club's rules were loosening up: men were wearing tuxedos, not tailcoats to the Assemblies and "members of the Gibbsville Club were requested not to stand near the windows with highballs in their hands, where they could be seen by passerbys on Lantenengo Street".[63]

In the 1960's and 1970's, the Pottsville Club relaxed its rules. Jewish people and women were admitted to the club. Women had to ring for admittance; only the men were permitted keys to this elitist institution. But, the women were such a strong element in it that they created a ladies' auxiliary. One rule from Julian English's day remained. People were still posted at the Pottsville Club if their membership was not paid on time. Unfortunately, this formal conduct succumbed to modernity.

By 1974, the old, formal Pottsville Club was burnt down by an arsonist. To-day, the club's location is at the top of Mahantongo Street and 26th Street. A former ski lodge was converted into Pottsville's elitist club. Its traditional look of the 1930's became outmoded. Now, tapedeck music is played during dinner. The tables are set with plastic floral arrangements, and oversize menus which had the club seal and founding date (1853) inscribed on them deck them. (This date differs with Zerbey's account of it.) Today, it has become another "Howard Johnson's".

O'Hara spoke about the Lantenengo/Schuylkill Country Club in Appointment in Samarra. This club still remains. Today, Jews can be members. "But, the golf course is the same," so neatly shaved that it made him think of a farmer in his Sunday suit surrounded by other farmers in overalls and straw hats".[64]

John O'Hara explained the various kinds of protocol that were required in Pottsville and Schuylkill County's clubs and organizations. One not only needed good manners, taste and a sense of protocol or conduct, but required a good family background to be admitted to the upper class cliques of the day. As mentioned before, money was not necessarily a prerequisite to obtain entry into these circles. Breeding and a sense of moral conduct could gain one entrance into the so-called aristocratic realms. Once again, Blanche Montgomery can be cited as an example of not using discretion. Yet even though Julian English played pranks and his grandfather committed suicide, his family was so well-established that if he was not included, for instance, in The Second Thursdays, the club would have to disband.[65] The genealogical data of a family ensured one's entrance into the crème de la crème, for example, the Caldwells of Fort Penn, the Englishes and the Chapins of Gibbsville, and the Millhousers of Lyons, Pennsylvania. One's association with a good College or University played an important part in one's background. A Yale man was different from a Penn State man, or a Haverford College man, or a Princeton man. Along with the educational qualities came one's taste in clothes, houses, and cars. As John O'Hara indicated, certain kinds of men have certain kinds of taste.

In the 1920's, it was recognized that a Franklin owner was not the same as a Buick owner, even though some Buicks cost the same as some Franklins. The Franklin owner would likely wear a Masonic Pin rather than a Shriners, an Elks Tooth or a Rotary Club button. He would be a tennis player, a doctor, a college man, and an independent thinker and have securities whereas the Buick man would likely be a golfer, a real estate agent, a non-college man, a less independent thinker, and have less securities than the Franklin owner for his money would be tied up in personal enterprises.[66]

It is apparent that the upper classes used their leisure time to cultivate the social graces that were necessary to maintain their particular milieu. An involvement with family and social class history and tradition was a familiar pastime. "Moral values change[d] more slowly on that level than on any other. The Twentieth-Century upper-class character is laden with moral values more suitable in the Nineteenth Century".[67] If their moral codes and rules were broken, disaster could only be the consequence. Hence, only a superior, upper class family such as the Tates "[could] accept or decline any invitation they [chose] because of their superior position, while other people [had to] accept every invitation out of fear of social reprisal".[68] Obviously, the higher the position, the less rigid the social restrictions.[69]

> [Sidney and Grace Tate]. Their position with regard to Fort Penn society was the same as it had been in 1903; it could not have been better in 1903, but in the succeeding ten years it had not worsened. They still were able to go anywhere they pleased and to regret any invitation that did not interest them; and as had been true of Will and Emily Caldwell's invitations, to be summoned to break bread with Sidney and Grace was to go.[70]

The Tate's social position was so genteel that they could keep even the Governor out of their tightly-knit clubs in Fort Penn, Pennsylvania:

> The Governor's secretary had a list of Fort Penn people that every Governor made sure of having at his house at least once a year. The list was headed Prominent Local Society, and the names of Mr. and Mrs. Tate were among the underscored, or most important; people who could keep Karl - the Governor or no Governor - out of the Fort Penn Club and keep Irma and Karl out of the Nesquehela Country Club.[71]

The old, traditional families had clout and could even destroy someone in their own class, for instance, Julian English. They could even maneuver Julian's wife, Caroline, to the point that she refused to go away with Julian. Both she and Julian knew that it would be futile to do this. Gibbsville society truly had its hold on Caroline.[72] As Caroline explained to Julian the severity of his crime, one realizes how her social heritage affected her:

> 'All right: is there something you've done? Have you done anything? Have you fallen in love with someone else?'
> 'Or necked someone else?' she said.
> 'Or laid someone else while you were sneaking your drinks in the locker room? No. My attitude, as you call it, comes from something much more subtle than that, Julian, but we won't go into it now.'[73]

Julian had... "committed an error in taste unbecoming to a member of the Gibbsville aristocracy," [74] and because of this mistake, had to settle with the dire consequences.

Obviously, social heritage had its role in the upper class. Without it, the upper class could no longer be an upper class. For example, Grace's brother, Brock Caldwell, wanted to write a family history in his leisure time. But, this was not the only function of one's social heritage. One's family and social history established the "very character firmly in a particular level of society" and with "a particular segment of society as well".[75] O'Hara was so aware of this fact that he paid careful attention to where the individual lived, was schooled and was employed.[76] In addition, he knew that the upper class family worried about blood ties, marriage, and breeding. For instance, Emily Caldwell understood that her daughter Grace, could marry only into a good family for:

> "The facts, as Emily saw them, were that Grace was a Caldwell and a Brock, the best blood in Fort Penn, families who by custom got things without even asking for them, because the people of Fort Penn acknowledged some kind of superiority".[77]

O'Hara realized that social connections, lineage and breeding were significant factors in an upper class family and with the Chapin family he illustrated these points:

> For the Benjamin Chapins were convinced of their own superiority, and when they compared themselves with other Gibbsville couples they always were able to reaffirm their self-appraisal. Benjamin Chapin's wife was born Charlotte Hofman, a Gibbsville, Pennsylvania, Hofman, and therefore connected with the Muhlenbergs, the Womelsdorfs, the Montgomerys, the Laubachs, the Penns, the Boones and the Leisenringers, the Fitz Maurices, the Blooms, the Dickinsons, and the Pennsylvania Lees. Charlotte Hofman was only twenty when she married Benjamin Chapin, who was thirty-four, but she was quite aware that towns and counties had been named after members of her family and that noble German blood flowed in her veins. She was a woman with a live sense of duty to the past and the future, a conviction that her body was the inheritor of elements that needed only proper fertilization for the breeding of a superior offspring. She was small, dark, and pretty, and rich, and had many suitors. She accepted Ben Chapin because he was old enough in Pennsylvania lineage to have connections almost as imposing as her own, and earlier New England connections that produced educators, soldiers, and governors. As to his own qualities, he was healthy, and honest and well liked by the major stockholders of the Coal and Iron Company. She married Ben Chapin in 1881 and their son, whom they called Joseph Benjamin Chapin after Ben's father, was born in the succeeding year."[78]

Another important dimension in the upper classes of Gibbsville was the aspect of education. O'Hara was so sensitive about it that his associates made fun of him. Ernest Hemingway was noted for saying "Let's take the bloody money and start a bloody fund to send John O'Hara to Yale".[9] O'Hara, himself, realized the significance of education, but due to unfortunate circumstances in his own life, he did not get any further than Niagara Prep School in 1924. Prior to this, he went to Miss Katie Carpenter's, on Mahantongo Street, on the third floor of a building at 212 where he learned to write at an early age. Usually, one went on to Mrs. Thurlow's, then grammar school; then Mercerberg, or Andover, or Westover, or Shipley. But, John O'Hara's mother was concerned about the school's Protestant teachings. John had to be a Catholic so he was sent on to St. Patrick's School.[10] From there, he went to Fordham Preparatory School in New York City; then to the Preparatory Division of the Keystone State Normal School in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, twenty-five miles southeast of Pottsville; then to Niagara Preparatory School in Buffalo, New York in 1924. At all three prep schools, he was dismissed. John O'Hara missed his mark. His aspirations to attend Yale fell to the wayside. Now, he could only dream and write about the schools that he wished he could have attended. As Charles W. Bassett pointed out,

> ---Yale meant a great deal to O'Hara, for to succeed at Yale, to write for the Lit, to make the "right" secret societies, to win those 'badges', would have redeemed him in a tangible way. And Yale was John's choice of colleges, not his father's. He would conquer New Haven on his own terms; he would define his own "first class".[11]

O'Hara realized his own father's family (the women except Nell) were educated at the Sisters of St. Joseph at Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia and the men (except Martin) attended the University of Pennsylvania, "the Commonwealth's oldest and most prestigious institution of higher education".[12]

This had a profound effect on John O'Hara. He loved the badges, the fraternities and the academic world. When he wrote, he wrote with an accuracy that showed his sensitivity towards this ivory tower existence. For instance, when he decided in a novel to send a boy off to St. Paul's School for three years of his prep education, (before he went to Yale), he wanted to know the special slang, special customs, et cetera from his friend, Pat Outerbridge who attended St. Paul's in 1925. O'Hara wanted the information to create an accurate picture of the Class of '29.

Letter to Pat Outerbridge: Thursday 7-21-55

> ---What I would like from you as an authority with a good memory is some strictly local color, peculiar to your peculiar alma mater at Concord. I hope to start you off on reminiscenes that will fill a page by asking you what they called the can at SPS. I can't remember what it was called at Niagara Prep Sch but at Fordham it was The Jakes. In addition to that skatological information, this is the kind of dope I would like:
>
> Any and all special slang.
>
> Customs for indoctrinating new boys, pleasant and unpleasant.
>
> Special treats. Special clothing regulations. Special quarters. Disciplinary measures by faculty and students. Songs, clean or not. Concord hangouts, approved or otherwise. Special games (such as Sniff, or The Wall Game). Names for girls (in Pottsville, Pa., they were called spivots, a name I never heard anywhere else). I guess you get the idea.
>
> Would you describe for me a boy's first day? I assume he would arrive in Boston, take the ... train on the B & M., and get off at Concord with a lot of other new boys, check in at the asst head's office (is he called THE Head at SPS) and be assigned his room and roommate(s). Are there any ceremonies or anything like that that I ought to know about to make the thing credible, or keep it from being incredible? I also want to have him in the infirmary for a time so that he falls behind in his classes but makes it up. If I remember old photographs correctly, SPS used to be all one big building. Was that changed by the fall of '26? I know you didn't play interscholastic football, so what about letters?---[13]

O'Hara knew his badges, fraternities and colleges. He realized which prep schools the young boys and girls must go to. He understood the customs, vices, and treats that were prevalent at various colleges and prep schools. He knew the difference between a Yale Man and Harvard Man. He made it his business to know the difference.

In The Lockwood Concern, O'Hara was so observant and knowledgable about prep schools that he related the standards of a snobbish one that the Lockwood boys attended:

> No Jew, even of the Sephardic aristocracy, and no Roman Catholic, even of the Maryland or Louisiana line, was admitted to the school during the Nineteenth Century. No native of the vast area between Charleston and New Orleans was able to satisfy Arthur Francis Ferris's social standards, nor would he let in any son of a brewer (distiller's sons were acceptable if they belonged to the landed gentry), a meat packer, a Baptist, a dentist, an Italian, a South American or a grand opera singer male or female.[14]

In his novel, Ten North Frederick, O'Hara described the prep schools and the top-notch private school that prepared the sons of gentlemen in Gibbsville. In Gibbsville, Gibbsville Country Day was the private school that prepared the children to go on to Andover, Hotchkiss, Lawrenceville, The Hill, Mercersburg, or Nichols in Buffalo; Shady Side in Pittsburg; Tower Hill in Wilmington, and Buckley and Allen-Stevenson in New York. Prior to Gibbsville Country Day, the children were taught by Miss Holton. One could stay at

G.C.D. from the fifth grade through senior high school, but no one really did. Children from well-to-do families in the mining and farming towns attended G.C.D. Private subscription allowed the school to clear up its annual deficits. Scholastically, G.C.D. was superior, but never any worse than the public grammar and high schools. It did not have a football team, but it had a baseball team, a track meet, and some good tennis players. But, it was understood that the public schools usually beat them. To the public school boys and girls, the children were known as Willie-Boys and Sissies at G.C.D. But support was forthcoming from their own sisters and cousins at Miss Holton's.

The original Gibbsville Country Day was a converted mansion at 16th and Christiana Street where the Jacob Rutter family of the Rutter Brewery once resided. One half of a Gibbsville block was its site. Later on, the school was situated at 22nd Street and Christiana. By this time, there was talk of converting G.C.D. into a boarding school, but people objected to it. After the first year of high school, the classes got smaller since the boys were sent to prep schools. By the time a boy reached his senior high school year, his class was so depleted that he was almost being tutored.[15] Men such as Joseph B. Chapin (high society, a blueblood, an aristocrat) considered other schools for their sons: St. Paul's, Juilliard, Curtis and even Pottstown.[16]

The girls in Gibbsville attended Miss Holton's (Miss Katie Carpenter's) and then went on to schools such as Foxcroft, St. Timothy's, Farmington, Westover, Shipley, Madeira's, Irwin's, Spence, and Oak Hill.[17]

As mentioned before, most people who went to University from Gibbsville went to Penn State, Lehigh for engineering, the University of Pennsylvania, Yale, Lafayette, and Muhlenberg. Most major colleges in the East or Middle West were represented in Gibbsville, but Harvard College seemed to be the exception.[18]

Families such as the McHenrys went to Dickinson College and the Chapins went to Yale; the Lockwoods from Swedish Haven to Princeton; the Eatons from Port Johnson to Princeton and the Tom Rothermells to Penn State. But, John O'Hara cited some prejudices, disadvantages and advantages of various educational institutions. To Gibbsville, the University meant the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, but Philadelphia was too far away. Most families in Pennsylvania wanted their sons to go to nearby colleges in smaller towns such as Easton, Allentown and Carlisle. People felt that Yale was a New England institution and Princeton was too strongly southern. But Joe Chapin with his pre-Pennsylvania New England background had to go to Yale. Not only this, but the Coal and Iron Company of Gibbsville was owned by men in Philadelphia and New York, where several Yale men resided. Hence, the advantages of friendships were abundant.[89]

It was understood that women such as Caroline English, if they went on to University, went to Bryn Mawr where the "Bryn Mawr manner mean[t] quick maturity and an everlasting tendency to enthusiasms".[90]

When John O'Hara spoke of an individual in his novels, he normally named the person's school, the fraternities he belonged to and even the school pins he wore. He was able to decipher which type of man went to such a school. For instance, Joe Chapin was thought of as a Harvard Man, yet he attended Yale and Penn Law School. The Governor of Pennsylvania speaking to Mike Slattery, a politican, claimed:

> ---"Not even Harvard Law School. Always thought of Joe as a Harvard man, but I guess there are quite a few of the same type at Yale. Always polite, trying to have a good time, but always making you think perhaps your fly was open or your necktie was crooked."[91]

It is obvious that John O'Hara knew the "proper" prep schools, colleges and universities to attend. He even emphasized how the McHenrys were quick to be committed to the "Big Four" when Arthur went to Yale with Joe Chapin. The McHenrys for generations went to Dickinson's first rate law school, but the Chapins persuaded them to send Arthur with Joe to the University of Pennsylvania and Yale. The winning argument was based on the social connections that the boys would accumulate throughout their school careers.[92] John O'Hara knew that "anybody but anybody" in Gibbsville or Pottsville and surrounding vicinity **had** to attend a renowned University. His list matched the best. By 1945, the year Joe Chapin passed away, the town was thinking about a University Club for the Gibbsville Club had a long waiting list and people wanted to join a club other than the Elks.[93]

In John O'Hara's world, the upper class families had the opportunity to go to Yale (Joe Chapin), Lafayette College (Julian English, Henry Laubach, William English), Princeton (Alfred Eaton, Joseph Chapin Jr.), Harvard (Lex Thorton), University of Pennsylvania (William Dilworth English), Dickinson (Arthur Davis McHenry), Muhlenberg (Dr. Schwenk, Judge Flickinger), Lehigh or Haverford College (Carter Stokes, Ralph Ridgway Ballard). Gibbsville had the good families that "spent a lot of money to educate" their young. But, as Joe Chapin pointed out "But they gave us something else besides".

> "Well, all those years before we went away to school, we were learning all about the people and the geography, the streets, the names of the towns and patches. You might say we took a course in Gibbsville."[94]

Hence, the children from upper class families had a well-rounded education. Not only did they know local Gibbsville, and surrounding territory, but they received a national and international outlook from the traditional institutions they attended.

Educational background determined a person's dress. If one was a student at Harvard, one was "nattily dressed in a sack suit from Brooks, a white shirt and a black knit necktie".[95] But, a Princeton man such as Joe Montgomery dressed in Brooksy clothes and a raccoon coat.[96] A Lafayette man such as Julian English at Christmas time donned his black waxed-calf shoes with his dark grey suit and tie, and starched collar, with a Spitalsfield, tiny black and white figure in the morning. He knew the right things to put in the right pockets: wallet, watch and chain and gold miniature basketball and Kappa Beta Phi key, two dollars in silver coins, fountain pen, handkerchiefs, cigarette case, and leather key purse.[97] When driving, Julian wore Herbert Johnson hats from Brooks Brothers. He did not like hatless men in closed cars: "it was too much like the Jews in New York who ride in their town cars with the dome lights on".[98] Julian also wore studs in his shirts; wore garters, and waistcoats when he dressed.

People such as Porter Ditson, one of the idle rich, a character from the fictitious town of Spring Valley, PA. wore "a very old polo coat, a double-breasted grey flannel suit, a striped necktie, a blue shirt and --- cracked patent leather pumps".[99] On a skating outing, Porter Ditson wore a beret, coonskin coat, knickerbockers and a red-and-blue V-neck tennis sweater.[100] O'Hara illustrated with Ditson that his style and taste would not be compromised in the whirlwind of new fads and fashion. Ditson remained steadfast with his fashion preferences and still was considered a very well-dressed man about town.[101]

O'Hara knew how gentlemen dressed. He illustrated this well with Sidney Tate in A Rage to Live. He indicated that gentlemen always wore a gold collar pin shaped like a safety-pin and men's garters in the early 1900's.[102] O'Hara examined the clothing of Sidney Tate of Fort Penn in close detail at the Wednesday, July 4th, 1917 Festival held at his Tate Farm located eleven miles North of Fort Penn on Nesquehela Pike. O'Hara described Tate wearing a Norfolk jacket, white flannels, with buckskins (now grass-stained), a soft white shirt with a gold safety-pin in the collar, a striped necktie, and a white linen handkerchief tucked in the panel of his jacket----[103] Sidney Tate obviously assumed the role of a well-dressed gentleman.

But, O'Hara's character, Jim Malloy in Butterfield 8, claimed that to be well-dressed was wearing "good clothes without ever being theater-program well-dressed...."[104] Jim Malloy was a "Brooks Brothers man" who wore button-down collars. According to John O'Hara, "In his day the smartly attired Englishman wore a double-breasted grey flannel suit, a Homberg and a tab-collared shirt".[105]

O'Hara knew how to dress the rich for any occasion. For instance, for Joseph B. Chapin's funeral in 1945, O'Hara dressed Joseph Chapin Jr. in the most proper attire of the time:

> ---And yet a stranger would have known that Joe Junior very much belonged at graveside. His attire, of course, proclaimed the mourner: his black knitted necktie in a starched collar; his black topcoat, blue serge suit, black shoes and black homburg were all of superior workmanship and material and did not show professional wear. No article of his attire had been bought for the occasion; all came from a complete wardrobe, items to be worn on other, dissimilar occasions but available for occasions like this one.[106]

Not only did O'Hara know the dress of the era for men, he knew children's attire as well. When Joseph Chapin Jr. was a young child, his clothing had to be knickerbockers until he was 15 years old, and then he was allowed to wear long trousers. Hence, he wore boots and breeches most of the time since he did not want to look like "an overgrown oaf".[107] But, when Joby went on to Princeton, he wore a Chesterfield, a tan hat with a stitched brim, and a gabardine jacket and flannel slacks. At the time, (1930's), the Yale-Harvard-Princeton undergraduates were considered indistinguishable.[108] But, his father Joseph B. Chapin, who represented the well-dressed upper class, until the end of his life wore "small-figured neckties, well-boned English shoes, and his narrow-sleeved double-breasted suits.[109]

O'Hara knew Brooks Brothers of New York, Peal Shoes of London, and even Philips Shirts of Pottsville. In an interview with a long-time resident of Pottsville in May, 1984, it was related that at the beginning of the century Philadelphia Main Liners came to Pottsville to do their shopping for Peal shoes, Philips Shirts, et cetera. Pottsvillians or Gibbsvillian upper classes were dressed in proper attire at all times. However, Joe Chapin when he dressed

> ---had his suits made in New York, but he patronized Main Street for socks and underwear, which gave him the opportunity to appear in the store, and gave the

> merchant the benefit of his patronage above the actual money spent. Joe's suits, shoes and hats came from out of town, but almost every-thing else he bought was bought in town or ordered through town merchants.[110]

According to O'Hara, if an individual were an upper class woman with a Yale husband, one dressed such as this when on an outing to Philadelphia:

> She [Edith Chapin] wore a tarnished blue straw hat with a wide black band, and her dress, which was open at the throat, was of navy-blue linen with a white leather belt, and she had on black silk stockings and white buckskin shoes with perforated black strapping across the vamp. Her only jewelry, besides her wedding and engagement rings, was a plain gold circle at the bottom of the V of her throat. She dressed like a Member, belonging exactly to her class, with a Yale husband in the background, tennis and swimming for exercise, Protestantism for her religion, extravagance nowhere in her character, and discontent never far from her contemplation.[111]

Or, in Gibbsville, Edith dressed in this manner:

> It was a time of the long, tailored line, when ladies' outfits came in three pieces of skirt, blouse and ankle-length coat, following the natural waistline. The design was to make women look tall, with vertical stitching and piping to further the scheme. Edith was an ideal model for the suits and dresses, and even the hats, which were enormous and elaborate (and expensive), were, if not "becoming", effective in drawing the attention away from the face that was less than beautiful.[112]

Another example of a tastefully dressed woman in Gibbsville in 1930 was Mrs. Waldo Wallace Walker. She occasionally dressed in a brown sweater with a narrow leather belt, a tweed skirt from Mann and Dilks, Scotch grain shoes with fringed tongues, and a three-cornered hat---- She was so well-attired that even a stranger would know that she had trunkfuls of once stylish suits, hats, and dresses.[113]

The critic Lionell Trilling felt that O'Hara was so aware of fashion and human emotion that:

> "He (O'Hara) knows, and persuades us to believe, that life's deepest emotions may be expressed by the angle at which a hat is worn, the pattern of a necktie, the size of a monogram, the pitch of voice, the turn of a phrase of slang, a gesture of courtesy and the way it is received ... For him customs and manners are morals."[114]

O'Hara was so accurate about dress that the late critic S.J. Perelman called him "an oracle on men's fashions":

> "Where'd you get that Norfolk?" O'Hara once asked Perelman.
> "When I told him, (O'Hara) snorted in disbelief.
> 'Impossible. Brooks hasn't carried that model in years.'"[115]

George Frazier, a writer, summed up O'Hara's fashion consciousness with the following statement:

> Naturally, one reason we have this affinity for O'Hara is that he knows about court tennis and custom tailoring and chic clubs, and if Alfred Kazin doesn't like

> it, why doesn't he review writers who know about stick ball and where to buy a suit with two pairs of pants and a catcher's mitt?[116]

In a nutshell, O'Hara's biographer, Matthew J. Bruccoli, summarized O'Hara's feelings about fashion: "O'Hara felt you are what you wear".[117]

But, O'Hara did not only dress the upper class in the proper attire and accoutrements of the time, he housed them "properly" as well:

> The Chapin house was the only one on Frederick Street that had a stoop of three chaste brownstone steps. The other houses of equal age and proportion had marble stoops, originally chaste but soiled by time and traffic. The front door was a massive fixture, four inches in thickness, with a brass plate the size of a playing card, in which had been cut the name Benjamin Chapin. The patina from years of polish and rubbing left the name barely distinguishable. The plate was screwed into the door at a point sixty-eight inches from the bottom, or eyes' height as measured to the full height of Benjamin Chapin. Beneath the name plate, exactly halfway from top to bottom of the door, was a letter-slot of brass bearing the words Letters. (It had not been used in many years, a fact known to the regular letter carrier, but confusing to the occasional extra carrier, who did not know that the slot was permanently closed to keep out draught and dust.) Above the door was a fan light into which was etched the number 10. The outer side of the light had not been washed - "hopeless," was Edith's word for the task of keeping it clean - but the inside was comparatively free of dust. The doorknob and the bell-button assembly were of figured bronze, the latter a later copy of the design for the knob, made by hand at the time of the substitution of the electric bell for the bronze pull. The knob of the bronze pull still served as a paperweight in Joe Chapin's study, mounted on mahogany in which had been picked out the date of the installation of electricity in the Chapin's house.
>
> The entrance was in the center of the street floor. On each side of the entrance, on the western elevation, was a pair of windows, plate glass, separate but twins. The window sills were high enough above the street level to make it impossible for the nosy to peer in, and in any event there usually was nothing to see but furniture, since the rooms were seldom used in the daytime and the shades lowered, the curtains drawn, every night.[118]

On Joe Chapin's burial day, O'Hara depicted a scene of Edith Chapin's place in the 10 North Frederick Street house. Within the interior of the house, one could contemplate both the exterior and interior of it:

> Edith Chapin was alone in her sewing room on the third floor of the house---- The shutters in the bay-window were closed, but the slats in the shutters were open, and Edith Chapin could, when it pleased her, go to the bay-window and look down on her yard and the two-story garage that had been a stable and above and beyond the gilded figure of a trotting horse on the weather vane she could see roof upon roof upon third story upon third story of the houses on the rising hill. She would know the names of nearly all of the people who lived in them, she knew the names of the owners.[119]

When Joe took over the house after his parents died, Edith realized her comfortable status. She knew that the house was a symbol of her improved station in life and she did not want to alter it. The only room that she changed throughout her whole married life was the den. In this room, she put Joe's school and college pictures, his diplomas, his fraternity and club shields and other youthful souvenirs. This she did to make Joe happy.[120]

O'Hara not only described the exterior of the Chapin's fashionable, and comfortable home, but its interior in quite a detailed fashion:

> The front room at the right as you entered the Chapin house was the dining room, connected through a swinging door with the butler's pantry and the kitchen. Off the hall, on that side of the house, was also a lavatory, and in the hall the front stairway. The front room at the left of the hall was the sitting room and beyond it a room that Edith Chapin called the library or den but that before her marriage had been called the back sitting room (and which was so indicated on the signal box in the pantry, with the letters BSR).[121]

When the house was approaching its hundredth anniversary, Joe Chapin was very attached to it. He remarked to his daughter, Ann:

> "Gloomy old barn, but I love it... I'll live out my life here, and then your mother will, but after she's gone I'll bet you and Joby sell the place. Well, why shouldn't you? It's too expensive to run, and people aren't coming along to take the place of the Marians and Harrys."[122]

But an outsider's description of the house was given by Judge W. Lloyd Williams at Joe Chapin's funeral in 1945:

> "That's an old mausoleum, that house. I was never inside the place before. If the widow wants to get rid of it she won't have any trouble selling it for a funeral home".[123]

O'Hara obviously discovered the comfortableness of the upper class homes in Pottsville during the first half of the twentieth century. The Chapin home at 10 North Frederick Street, Gibbsville, represented the superior quality and workmanship, and taste of the homes of the so-called "aristocrats" of Gibbsville. It was justifiably called "a symbol" by Edith Chapin, and it certainly was: It was a symbol of a passing age.[124]

Not only did John O'Hara describe the clothing and houses of the period 1900 to 1930 in an accurate fashion, but he knew the wealthy's mode of transportation. His description of the types of automobiles and trucks present at The Tates' July 4th, 1917 festivities were typical of the day:

> ---Ford cars and Maxwells and Chevrolets and Partin-Palmers and Buicks and Hahn trucks and Maccars and Garfords and Autocars and Vims, and a few Cadillacs, Franklins and one Locomobile and one Winton.[125]

But, as previously mentioned, the upper class who were sure of themselves could buy a Dodge - "a sturdy, inexpensive, hard-riding, economical clean-lined car"

> ---not a Marmon, or a Mercer - or a Ford. It was a car with a tricky gear shift, different from the standard shift and the Buick shift. And because Joe Chapin had bought a Dodge, a lot of people bought Dodges who had the money to buy

Lincolns. If it was good enough for Joe Chapin...[126]

Obviously, Joe Chapin set precedence amongst his peer group. But, when Joe Chapin was appointed as a delegate to the regional and state conventions, he knew enough to keep his Pierce-Arrow in the garage during his campaigning and bought a middle-class Buick Phaeton. "No use flaunting the trappings of wealth when the Buick got you there just the same".[127] Nevertheless, Joe realized that professional politicians drove automobiles such as the Daniel, the Cunningham, the Packard, the Locomobile, the Peerless and the Cadillac in 1927.[128] But, the comfortable who had lived in Europe for a time had their foreign roadsters. For example, ~~Barbara Danworth~~ and Veronica Plaisted drove a red Fiat back in 1927.[129]

O'Hara mentioned automobiles such as the Chrysler roadster that belonged to Frank Gorman; the Studebaker that belonged to Mrs. Shawse; the V-61 Cadillac coach that was driven by Al Grecco, and the blocked sale of the Cadillac to Mrs. Shawse (who supposedly had an affair with her negro chauffeur, Walter); the Scripps-Booth roadster that belonged to Caroline English; the Baker electric that belonged to Mrs. Waldo Walker; the red Jordan roadster that belonged to Joe Montgomery; the Rolls that belonged to Mrs. Montgomery, and the Ford in front of the Englishs' home on the night of Julian English's suicide in Appointment in Samarra.[130] O'Hara spoke of the automobiles of the time with admiration, and he knew of their so-called intricacies. In his novel Appointment in Samarra, O'Hara explicitly described the sounds of the 1930 Dodge automobile:

> Irma lay there, fully awake, and heard a sound: cack, thock, cack thock, cack thock. A car with a loose cross-chain banging against the fender, coming slowly up or down Lantenengo Street, she could not make out which. Then it came a little faster and the sound changed to cack, cack, cack, cack-cack-cack-cack. It passed her house and she could tell it was an open car, because she heard the flapping of the side curtains. It probably was a company car, a Dodge.[131]

Martin O'Hara alluded to his brother John's graphic and precise description of this cross-chain in a conversation with me in May, 1984.[132] He felt that his brother could accurately portray any type of scenario, even the clanging of an automobile's cross-chain. O'Hara's knowledge of automobiles was illustrated by Harry's love for Joe Chapin's Pierce-Arrow:

> In his own words, he stayed out of the way as much as possible, and his love for the big Pierce-Arrow kept him close to the stable, which he had begun to call the garridge. An hour after the car had been returned to the garage a man could have run a white-gloved finger under the fenders and found them

> spotless. All six cylinders were treated as individuals, and his principal reading was the Pierce-Arrow manual furnished by the Foss-Hughes firm in Philadelphia. The radiator petcock was as ready for inspection as the lap robe, and frequently Harry would sit in the car happily when he could have been sitting comfortably in the kitchen with a spiked cup of tea. Sometimes when Charlotte sent for him he would send back word that he was all greasy when such was not the case.[133]

John O'Hara's graphic description of the truck and automobile certainly gives the reader a clear-cut picture of the modes of transportation available to the elite between 1900 and 1930.

In conclusion, not only was O'Hara able to record his view of the upper crust of Pennsylvania in a straight-forward manner and preserve it in the novel form, but his vision coincided with various critics' analyses and in-depth studies of this segment of society. Obviously, his portrayal from principles to fashion reflected the real world of this strata in the early 1900's in Pennsylvania. Thus, O'Hara rightfully deserves the label of a "social historian" for his documentation of the upper classes in the first half of the 20th century.

Footnotes

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3 A Rage to Live, p. 237, cited by John Lewis Cobbs, "The Pennsylvania Novels of John O'Hara" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1975), p. 84.

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## CHAPTER 4

## An Inside Look at the "Private Hells" of the Elite

> Death speaks:
> There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.[1]

In John O'Hara's first novel Appointment in Samarra, he quoted this excerpt from the British author W. Somerset Maugham's work that strikingly dictated the destiny of the upper class in Pennsylvania. O'Hara saw life for the rich in Gibbsville and Pennsylvania without any hope. He realized that once the external covering of refinement was removed, Gibbsvillians were doomed. Failure was their only destiny.[2]

In his novels, O'Hara portrayed both the refined, genteel side of the upper class in Pennsylvania, along with its rather sordid one which included failure, pessimism, perversion, suicide, alcoholism, and loneliness. O'Hara was able to peer into the very minds of his upper class personages and unmask the inevitable suffering that the rich had undergone when their severe social codes were broken. O'Hara's depiction of the rich ultimately reached the foregone conclusion that the wealthy were just as bad off as anyone else. Since their position was rather frozen in Gibbsville, they suffered even more at times for they could not escape their niche in society.[3]

O'Hara's viewpoint was that the rich could only temporarily escape their ultimate lot. They succumbed to the deviations of sex or alcohol to raise their spirits, or clung to the avenues of social mobility to maintain a sense of false emotional security.[4] O'Hara seemed to drive his point home. The rich had a "private hell" and horrendous disappointments; hence, an "Appointment in Samarra". They could not escape their destiny. No mere adaptation of social graces, protocol, influence or wealth could erase their ultimate fate. Once the rigid codes of conduct were departed from, the individuals concerned were brought to naught. There was no turning back.

When one peers into the Gibbsville milieu, and removes one's rose-coloured glasses, it becomes evident that the upper classes who were taught to adhere to their rather rigid moral codes, and principles could not cope with the severity of them. The only code that could have alleviated any such pain if followed was Judge W. Lloyd Williams' advice to Arthur McHenry:

> I've come to the conclusion that the safest way to live is first, inherit money. Second, marry a woman that will co-operate in your sexual peculiarities. Third, have a legitimate job that keeps you busy. Fourth, be born without a taste for liquor. Fifth, join some big church. Sixth, don't live too long.[5]

This code, as previously mentioned, was the backbone of the strata and if it was deviated from, an individual would lead a life of utter despair.

It is apparent that in O'Hara's world the people were "drift[ing] through a haze of convention, boredom, and despair" to emerge perhaps lifeless, empty, or isolated. Charles Child Walcutt suggested:

> In this haze the people are depressed and bad-tempered, quick to take offense, unsure of their loves and hates, able to damage themselves irretrievably by a gesture or a whim of desire. Nobody seems to be quite centered inside his skin, sure of where he is and who he is. The conventional things they do in Gibbsville do not satisfy their yearnings for Reality, whatever it is. Life is not only passing but also blurring and shifting around them. They drift through sports, business, sex, conversation, drink, but they are able to upset the easy ride with an uncontrollable outburst of rage. This is, perhaps, another way of saying that the manners do not suffice: the forms which presumably embody their spirits do not fulfill them.[6]

For instance, Julian English who had literally everything: good breeding, wealth, enrolment in the proper clubs, and a Bryn Mawr, wife stooped to the evils of drinking scotch and ice. Then, he committed the unpardonable sin of throwing his drink with its ice into Harry Reilly's face. From that moment on, Julian had no place to go or hide, and his peer group in Gibbsville was disgusted with his behaviour. He was absolutely humiliated and then hated. Consequently, he was swept into a sequence of events that could only bring his impending doom upon himself: a sexual episode with the singer Helen Holman; a fight with Froggy Ogden and a lawyer; an attempted seduction of the journalist, Alice Cartwright; then his successful suicide. Ultimately, he, too, had met his "Appointment in

Samarra".[7]

It is obvious that O'Hara did not mince his words. He was able to perceive the reality of the upper classes and did not gloss over any situation whatsoever. With the example of Julian English, O'Hara even took a closer look at an upper class character who was being ostracized by his peer group and tried to demonstrate the psychological consequence of this action.[8] O'Hara felt that the upper class, with all its glittering paraphernalia, had only doom to face. The upper class which was so tightly-knitted and so conventional could only live within its tightly-bound set of rules. If one deviated from this framework, one could only come to destruction. Once fitted into a Gibbsville niche, it was difficult to rise above it. For instance, if one compares the aristocrat, Joe Chapin and the butcher who both lived in the downgraded section of Gibbsville, both had to come to grips with their lives. They both had established their "lot in life" and could not rise above it due to their particular class standing:

> There was only a small difference in their ages, an inconsiderable difference; and the two men had several matters in common. Each man had a son and a daughter, disappointing children. Both men had remote wives from whom they had never been separated. And now, with most of life gone in the one case and all of it gone in the other, it was too late for either man to realize his great ambition. The butcher had wanted to be heavy-weight prize-fight champion of the world. Joe Chapin had always wanted to be President of the United States, and thought he ought to be.[9]

But, whatever niche an individual was in, he had to be able to withstand the censure exerted upon himself when he committed an error in taste. It is apparent that Julian English did not have the intestinal fortitude to overcome the pressure from the "smoking room of the Lantenengo Country Club" or the pressure exerted by the Pennsylvania Dutch of the community.[10]

One of Julian's father's associates, Joe Chapin, in Ten North Frederick had an extra-marital affair with his daughter Ann's girlfriend, Kate Drummond. But, no matter how in love he was with her, he could not divorce his wife; for then, he would be considered a truly weak man and a scoundrel. He could not handle that kind of pressure. Consequently he became an alcoholic and finally died of cirrhosis of the liver. He realized his life was filled with loneliness, remorse, isolation, and emptiness. He only had one choice left: his ultimate fate: death. When he expressed his feelings to Kate, he uttered his life's sentence:

"Tonight I'll be in Gibbsville, going from the station to my house. And I'll know

> every face I see, and the houses I've passed a thousand times. I know which sidewalks are brick and which ones are concrete.
>
> Everything the same as when I left there yesterday morning. But I won't be the same. Practically nobody in town will know I've been away, and won't know I've come back to what? To nothing, to everything that's away from you, Kate. To nothing. To death. To the end of life. To death. To life away from you."[11]

From this point on, Joe Chapin assumed a role of utter desolation:

> As the years went by, and beginning rather soon after Joe's hotel luncheon with Kate Drummond, the silences were longer, and whiskey became a part of the meetings [between Joe and Arthur McHenry] ... Joe, after his last lunch with Kate, stopped putting ice in his drinks and the proportion of water to whiskey became closer to even. The quiet drinking never increased to the point where Arthur, saying good night, could have called his friend drunk, but he could not help noticing that every night there was a fresh, new bottle, and without asking, Arthur had no way of knowing how long Joe would sit in the den, smoking a pipe, humming old songs, sipping watered whiskey and reviewing his life.[12]

O'Hara illustrated well the consequences of any social transgressions and their final results of alcoholism and suicide, in Julian English's case, and alcoholism and death in the instance of Joe Chapin. Both men destroyed their own lives due to psychological and emotional frustrations. Their needs could not be satisfied in either situation whether it be relief from public censure or an undying love fulfilled; hence, the dire consequences. O'Hara with his uncanny perceptiveness exposed the emptiness, loneliness, desolation, and futility within the upper classes. This refined strata, if they could not control their so-called destiny, "[suffered] undue punishment."[13]

It is apparent that the social pressures exerted upon this segment of society were so immense that they became unbearable for its membership. Thus, various individuals escaped into their temporary diversions. One such deviation was the one of perversion. In all his novels, O'Hara alluded to some type of perversion - incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, pedophilia, prostitution, and other peculiar sexual practices within or without a marriage. Some of the oddities in sexual matters occurred because of a life of isolation, loneliness and sorrow. For example, Robert Millhouser, an upper class 51-year old man of Lyons (Lykens) married Hedda Steele, an 18-year old who actually could find sexual relief via a hand. Robert fulfilled her wishes. In one instance, Robert Millhouser attempted to have intercourse with his wife, but her sexual peculiarities overcame her:

> "Lie down", he said. "Get on the bin".
> "I don't want to", she said. "Your hand, damn you".
>
> He did as she asked and then she let him go and held his head with both her

> hands and covered his face with kisses, his mouth, his eyes, his cheeks.
> "Oh, how lovely," she said.[14]

Other sexual idiosyncrasies were part of Hedda's nature. Hedda imagined that she was her Mother with her lover, Bart Vance:

> ---"You like my mother, don't you?"
>
> "Yes".
>
> "Well, you'll never have her, but you can have me just this one more time. I'll be my mother and you be you. My mother's going to surprise you, Bart. Oh, I know a lot about that woman. She sits on my father's lap, like this..".[15]

Robert only put up with this perverted behavior for:

> His lifelong loneliness changed into an angry thing, a historical thing that had been angered, and without considering the causes of the angry loneliness or the reasons for it, he was determined that for a while it would cease to exist.
>
> There was something he wanted - Hedda - that would eradicate loneliness, or anaesthetize it, and this was his last chance. And that was in the sadness. Pity, guilt, the last chance to be *with* someone; and the person was Hedda, who was a treat to so many of his senses.[16]

O'Hara touched upon the crudity of the upper classes of the early 1900's; their demented side that erupted from their feelings of pessimism, unhappiness, isolation, and loneliness. John O'Hara seemed to have an obsession with the female counterpart of homosexuality - lesbianism throughout his novels. Even in his first book Appointment in Samarra, he mentioned that Mill Ammerman would have been noted as a lesbian in New York, but in Gibbsville she would have been considered just "a healthy girl", "Good Old Mill".[17] Or, in Ten North Frederick, Edith Chapin, had a lesbian affair with Barbara Danworth at Hanna Payne's School. This amorous episode rather limited her sexual encounters and her enjoyment with her husband, Joe Chapin.[18] Edith hated men and in no way "[could] give of herself, or in any way assume a passive role either sexually or as a marriage partner."[19] On her wedding night, Edith expressed to herself and to Joe who was asleep:

> "I own you," she said. "At last."... And she began to understand that he was going to take a lot of owning and that she had been wrong in thinking that owning him was going to be so quick and simple a matter as she had hoped and believed .... It was not love; love might easily have very little to do with it; but it was a strong desire as love or hate and it was going to be her life, the owning of this man.[20]

After her marriage, Barbara Danworth and Veronica Plaistead visited Edith at her farm in the summer of 1927. Barbara, in her conversation with Edith, related that Veronica would never leave her for a man, but possibly a woman. Edith's reply was:

> "I guess I'm very ignorant. We don't see much of that sort of thing here".

> "Now don't be haughty, Edith. Don't be a one hundred per cent American. Remember, you started me, 'way back at Hannah Payne's School, and you'd never been anywhere but Gibbsville, Pennsylvania".[21]

But, during this conversation, Veronica came close to Edith's daughter and put her arm around her shoulder. Edith realized this and asked Barbara to get her friend and leave her premises. The startling revelation was this:

> The irony of the unrealized threat was as frightening a part of it as any of the facts, and Edith felt punishment - or a strong enough threat of it to be the same - of a Divinely ironic nature. If the Deity wanted to mete out an elaborate and belated punishment, that was the way He would do it.--- A revelation of her old relationship with Barbara would have been greater than any admission she could have got in return, for Joe had long ago admitted that in prep school he and other boys had watched each other masturbate. She had not matched his rather mild confession with any admission of her own (and he had accepted her claim of total purity). Now, at this late date, to have to admit the totality of her schoolgirl affair and the year's time it lasted, would have been to give Joe some kind of advantage that she had resisted giving him all her life. He was a man, her husband, who would hold it over her even now, and she would be compelled to relinquish some of that ownership of him that she needed for her soul. But most dangerous of all - if anything had happened to Ann. If through that ugly irony anything had happened to Ann, Joe's revenge on Edith would have been as calculated and as thorough as his love for the child was complete and instinctive. In the recent years of his going after the prize he wanted, he had, without knowing it, gained new respect from Edith.[22]

O'Hara saw the informal side of a woman's marriage and realized that there was no release for an upper-class woman outside of marriage. If she had an affair, it was an infraction of her class's moral code. Hence, a cathartic release could be with a woman, and she would be thought of as a good wife, for who would really know her intimate moments? For instance, in O'Hara's novel, Lovey Childs: A Philadelphian's Story, Dorothy Lewis, the widow of F. Willingham Lewis, succumbed to her daughter's girlfriend, Marcia Bancroft's sexual desires:

> [Marcia spoke to Dorothy:]
>
> "I'll see you later".?"
>
> "The humiliating thing was to be fully aware of the girl's insincerity and yet to be so grateful for the show of tenderness".[23]

That night Dorothy entered worlds that she had not visited before:

> The girl had come to her room, and she was a lovely thing in her loneliness and emotional starvation, wanting a woman and wanting the woman to want her. It was in Nature and it was natural - and it was exciting, exciting, exciting, more exciting than a man doing the same thing. She lay there listening to the sounds of the house at night, wishing she could go to sleep and wake up the next night with the girl beside her. She absolved herself of wrongdoing, and soon fell asleep.[24]

Eventually, after her affair with Marcia, Dorothy was arrested for harrassing Iris Baldwin (a friend of Lovey's from boarding school) in Buffalo, New York.[25] After this encounter, Dorothy was put in a home for treatment for bouts of depression and her perverted ways. The slogan "All hope abandon, ye who enter here" described the home in its entirety.[26] And all hope was abandoned, for only the demented, the perverted, and the lost required this type of treatment. Once one went through that door, there was no turning back.

Even Dorothy's daughter, Lovey, had an affair with a woman reporter, Virginia Vernon (Ginny) on a ranch near Reno, Nevada, during her estrangement and divorce from her husband, the wealthy sportsman-millionaire, Sky Childs. But, Lovey Childs seemed to be twisted from the very beginning. She was always attracted to older men, for instance, the gardener Guy Glynn or the chauffeur, Walter Hughes:

> ---she had a lack of interest in the lives of her contemporaries, and they in turn were cold to her".
> "You ought to play with children your own age", her mother would say.[27]

After her lesbian affair with Ginny Vernon, Lovey had moments of sexual satisfaction with men. It appeared that she entered situations that were rather perverse. For example, she had an affair with Father McIldowney when he visited her home for a real estate inspection. To make it easier, Lovey suggested:

> ---'Just pretend I'm a nun', said Lovey.
>
> 'You shouldn't say that,' said the priest.
>
> 'I'll pretend I'm a nun. Does that make it all right?' said Lovey. 'How do I get this thing off?'
>
> 'I'll do it, it's easy when you know how,' said the priest. He undid his Roman collar and was left wearing trousers and a white shirt.[28]

After this particular sexual escapade, Father McIldowney hung himself from a rafter in the sacristy in the chapel.[29] Lovey Childs then turned around and married her first cousin Francis Worthington Lewis "and they became a team, they continued as a team, an institution". Old Grafton Williams announced at their twentieth wedding anniversary dinner:

> "Why do two people such as Lovey and Francis, as unlike each other as they were, manage to stay together for twenty years? My friends, I am convinced that there's only one reason. Habit. Habit. There's no other explanation for it. That, and the fact that Lovey gave up living in New York, and they both came back to Philadelphia, where they belong".
>
> And that was uttered twenty years ago.[30]

When O'Hara dealt with the upper classes' perverted ways in the 1920's in Lovey Childs, the New York Times stated:

> John O'Hara gets it out on paper better than anyone has gotten it out since the boys first swapped whoppers in the locker room and the barracks, with the true American faith that Lady Chatterley really does like to do what we boys like to think she likes to do.[31]

O'Hara shockingly emphasized that people were depraved amongst the genteel in Pennsylvania: "Cruel, jealous, degenerate people, none of them now living in Philadelphia, thank heaven".[32]

Other kinds of sexual deviations existed in O'Hara's lonely world. For instance, Zilph Millhouser, Robert's mother, was raped by Reverend Emil Betz who, then, in turn, committed suicide.[33] Hedda Steele, Robert's wife, had an affair with a religious boy, Johnny Villareal in Mexico City. But, what was horrifying was not the affair, but the pornography that she was excited by. Her mother confided to her father:

> ---'I discovered a stack of photographs, the worst things I ever saw in my life. I couldn't even tell you about them, they were so awful---'.[34]

O'Hara discovered the world of the homosexual with Sterling Calthorp, Robert Millhouser's friend, who eventually ended up as a Catholic and a monk. In addition, O'Hara gave us a glimpse of homosexuals in Lyons (Lykens) on Saturday night:

> ---There were several bold homosexuals who would walk slowly past Kleckner's poolroom on Saturday night until two or three young men who had lost their money at pool would detach themselves from the group and follow the fairies down the alley....[35]

In Ourselves to Know, O'Hara elaborated upon the quirks, peculiarities and eccentricities of the middle and upper classes in Lyons, (Lykens), Pennsylvania. Men and women did such things as wear unusual or out-of-date clothes; interrupted sermons in church; one man touched his eyeballs with the tip of his tongue; another had a well-developed female bust; some men and women were double-jointed. Such oddities were prevalent in the proud, unique, distinctive, superior town of Lyons (Lykens). But, Lyons "maintained the appearance of respectable normality" and thus conventionality covered up the eccentricities of those few.[36] It did not matter where one went in the first half of the twentieth century in Pennsylvania, the upper classes truly had their deviations.

In Ten North Frederick, O'Hara mentioned incest when Joby Chapin and his sister were having a conversation on their father's burial day:

> He [Joby] smiled. "Annie, if you weren't my sister you might solve a lot of my

problems".

She smiled back at him. "Dear old boy, you've forgotten about incest".

"That's where you're wrong. That's one of my problems".

"Thanks for the compliment".

"Well, don't think it isn't a compliment".[37]

O'Hara also described Benjamin Chapin's observations about his wife, Charlotte, and her obsession with her son, Joseph in Ten North Frederick:

> --- And he was subtle enough to realize that the reason was too subtle for her to discover; it was not only the fear of giving birth to an idiot or dead child; it was her obsession with her son and his life. Ben was acquainted with the crime of incest, and the absence of incestuous practice did not remove the possibility of an incestuous desire, no matter how monstrously preposterous the idea might seem to Charlotte (and, until the years of denial, to Ben).[38]

In Ourselves to Know O'Hara spoke about Robert Millhouser's analysis of his Mother's feelings towards himself: "My mother was someone who tried to love me but couldn't. I guess I didn't measure up to my father or first husband...."[39] The mother and son had such an abnormally close relationship that:

> ...Robert Millhouser attended to his business affairs, he withdrew from participation in the social life of Fort Penn, he satisfied his sexual needs at a house that was operated by a successor to Mrs. Jones, he made no effort to find a successor to [his close friend] Dr. Willetts, and while neither he nor [his mother] Zilph Millhouser ever put it into spoken words, they knew that the routine into which they settled was to be their mode of life until the death of one of the two terminated the routine....[40]

When Robert's mother passed away, it "... simplified his own life by taking away the companionship which was a dreary substitute for the love he had yet to experience".[41] Millhouser claimed: "I think as far as women are concerned, I'm crippled for life".[42] Even though O'Hara only imparted certain characteristics of Robert Millhouser's life and did not directly say the word "incest" in his novel, I, personally, feel that all the makings of this type of situation were present.

O'Hara's graphic analyses of the upper classes extended to the deviation of pedophilia. In the situation he referred to, in Appointment In Samarra, it was the child's actions towards the adult that were emphasized. But, O'Hara did look into Miss Walker's mind and tried to record her feelings towards the child, a red-headed, 11-year old Irish brat before the actual incident occurred:

> --- She liked him but she hated him; she was afraid of him and the way he sometimes would stare at her when he wasn't making trouble. At home when she thought of him she would tell herself that he was a child whose great

> energy could and ought to be directed into useful channels. He was just a mischievous kid, and he could be "saved." ... Thus practically her entire sociological knowledge at the time. She was to learn a little more.[43]

But, when the sexual episode happened, Caroline was taken unaware. All of a sudden on a spring afternoon in 1926, she heard a footstep:

> Before she could see who it was - she saw it was a child - two arms went around her legs and two hands slid up under her skirt, a red little head was burrowing into her stomach. She slapped down at him and tried to push him away, and finally succeeded, but he had touched her where he wanted to with his vile little fingers, and she went insane and struck him many times, knocking him to the floor and kicking him until he crawled and ran away, out of the office, crying.[44]

Consequently, she constantly worried about contracting "a venereal disease or something". But, she still wondered "Why did he do it?" Her firm conclusion was: "that that was what you could expect of men, what she had been brought up to expect of men". But, when she looked back upon the incident---

> her ignorance of sex was pointed up. She knew herself for a completely inexperienced girl, and for the first time she began to remember the case histories in Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing and the lesser psychologists as more than merely pornography.[45]

O'Hara knew his deviations and in Butterfield 8 gave an account of an attraction of an older man (Major Boam) to Gloria Wandrous, a young, 12-year-old girl:

> He (Major Boam) tried to stay away from the Wandrous-Vandamm home after that, but the harder he tried, the more excuses he invented. He would plan to go there after he was sure Gloria would be asleep; but then he would be saying:
>
> "How's little Gloria?" and Vandamm would immediately say: "Come up and see her when she's asleep". Boam had business in Pittsburgh that was supposed to keep him there three or four days. He stayed a fortnight. All that time he knew what was happening to him. He did not know what he wanted to do with the child. He did know that he wanted to take her away, be alone with her.[46]

Finally, he ended up being alone with Gloria and the following episode happened:

> "Not much on," he said. Then panic and fright and the need of haste came on him, and his hands went wild. He kissed her so hard on the mouth that he hurt her and she could not be sure what else was going on, but she knew enough to struggle.
>
> He tried to pass it off with acrobatics. He held her high in the air and spoke to her and tried to laugh. He wanted to get out of this house, but he was afraid. He had not done anything but touch her, but he was afraid of the story she might tell. He could not leave until he was sure she would not run frightened to the kitchen and babble something to the maid. Then he said: "Well, I've kissed you good-by now, so I guess I'll go. All right?"
>
> She did not know what was the polite thing to say.[47]

O'Hara cited another incident with Gloria Wandrous and an older man, a respectable schoolteacher, in an hotel in New York:

> It was all too easy. Two days later she called at his hotel in the afternoon, and she was sent upstairs with a bellboy because the man had been a steady patron of the hotel, was known as a respectable schoolteacher, and probably was expecting her but forgot to say so. Within a month he had her sniffing ether and loving it. It, and everything that went on in that room.
>
> She did not see him as often as she wanted to; they could be together only in New York.[48]

Not only did O'Hara know pedophilia in the upper classes, he looked into the world of prostitution in Pennsylvania and realized men such as the aristocrat, Ben Chapin, who had simple needs, went to a whorehouse on Arch Street in Philadelphia:

> The place was expensive because of the vigilance of the man and woman who owned it. If a girl was known to be diseased, she was fired; if she spoke to a patron on the street, she was fired. And a new patron had to be introduced in person by an old patron.
>
> Young men in their twenties, no matter who they were, were not admitted, but there was no limit above thirty. The girls submitted to or participated in any perversion that did not involve the drawing of their blood or the burning of their flesh.[49]

O'Hara was so aware of prostitution that he stated a young man's introduction to the profession in Fort Penn, (Harrisburg) Pennsylvania. Robert Millhouser was introduced to Mrs. Jones' house of prostitution and saw one girl, Zaza, nine times in two years. The first night he was with her, Zaza claimed:

> "I want you to have a good time".
>
> "I want you to have a good time".
>
> "All right. Give me a good time", she said. She teased him until he was close to violence and then she accepted him and he was proud. He lay back with an arm around her neck.
>
> "Thank you," he said.[50]

His concluding thought was:

> Now it was enough that he had wanted this girl and responded to her, the excitement of her mystery and the sight of her body. It was enough for now, even if it would not always be enough. He fell asleep.[51]

O'Hara revealed some of the reasons why men went to whorehouses: either because their wives denied them or for quick satisfaction. He even related that the men who did have "quick satisfaction" once a month at a house of prostitution could not satisfy their wives.[52] With the example of Sidney Tate in A Rage to Live, he expressed that Sidney resorted most unhappily to a prostitute, and appeared to"[have] a horror of sex and [was] filled with fear" after his marital breakdown with his wife, Grace.[53] O'Hara seemingly understood the world of prostitution and its obvious effects upon the men that participated in such activities. But, on the whole, O'Hara was rather unsophisticated about the realm of prostitution. He did not really elaborate any further about the question "Why did men frequent houses of prostitution"? For what reason, we will never know. Was the topic, a topic "too close to home"? We know that O'Hara was able to write about a murder of a prostitute in the short story "The Gunboat and Madge" in which he described Schuylkill County's underworld.[54] He wrote this account from an actual experience that occurred in the mid-twenties when he was working at The Pottsville Journal. O'Hara definitely did not display a thorough knowledge of prostitution in his novels. For a man with such incredible insight into various kinds of sexual deviations, it is apparent that O'Hara had only touched upon the surface of it in his Pennsylvania novels. But, O'Hara's imagination and acute observations did not stop here.

O'Hara took another brief glance at other types of sexual idiosyncrasies amongst the refined: nyphomania, abortion, and paternity suits. Joe Chapin's daughter, Ann, had an abortion at a private hospital in Media, Pennsylvania. With the help of the politician, Mike Slattery, the records were destroyed. Due to Ann's forced abortion by her parents and her marriage anullment with an Italian jazz muscian, Charley Bongiorno, she became a nymphomaniac. One experience found her in a man's deserted apartment:

> In her first year in New York, Ann had slept with four, and possibly five - she was not sure - men.... One morning she awoke in a man's apartment, nude, and in the single large bed, with no idea of the man's name or what he looked like .... She searched for a picture that might recall what he looked like, and on a sudden inspiration she looked up the name in a college yearbook in his bookshelf. His name was there, and a distinct photograph, but she remembered nothing about him.[55]

It is also obvious that with the sexual perversion of nymphomania, O'Hara did not really expound upon the reasons "Why one became a nymphomaniac?" He gave a cursory glance at the subject with his example of Ann Chapin, and even described Grace Caldwell Tate as a woman who desired continuous sexual experiences, but "[did] not react to them and [did] not reflect on them". Consequently, we learn nothing about her.[56]

On the whole, O'Hara did not delve into the realm of nymphomania as he did with other deviations. He did not really seem to understand the background and psychological make-up of a nymphomaniac. In the cases of both Ann Chapin and Grace Caldwell Tate, he lacked the knowledge of their particular idiosyncrasies.

Nevertheless, O'Hara was definitely privy to the sufferings of women, but, he was also conscious of the fact that the men in the upper classes who had broken their severe moral codes and had extra-marital affairs had to pay a price too. For example, Sky Childs who had an affair with a telephone operator was sued for support for her child. Of course, Sky denied this and the operator was made out to be a "whore" during the court case. Nevertheless, scandalous publicity occurred.[57]

It is obvious that O'Hara captured the very whims, desires, obsessions, and idiosyncrasies of the upper classes as if they were on a painter's palette. He painted them in a descriptive and colourful manner. The aberrations of suicide and alcoholism were depicted with all the despair, pessimism, loneliness, emptiness, desolation and futility that evolved around these horrid consequences. The emotional and psychological needs and frustrations were explored in-depth, and the deviations that derived from these needs and frustrations were observed and analyzed in a very thorough fashion. O'Hara seemed to catch the very essence of these aberrations and conveyed them to the reader. His accurate knowledge and his acute awareness of such actions leaves one to wonder, how did he know eccentricities? Where did he receive his information? But, he stated that he was drawn to the upper classes and was fortunate enough to have an inside glimpse of their very nature. Hence, he could describe the emotions, the psychological needs and the frustrations of the rich that revealed the consequent eruptions of failure, pessimism, perversion, suicide, alcoholism and loneliness. He admitted that the suffering of the rich was no more alleviated than the suffering of the poor. The rich had truly their "Appointment in Samarra", and Julian English illustrated the case well with his obsession with alcohol and his ultimate fate of suicide, and the suffering that went with it:

> Julian, lost in the coonskins, felt the tremendous excitement, the great thrilling lump in the chest and abdomen that comes before the administering of an unknown, well-deserved punishment. He knew he was in for it.[58]

It is plainly clear that O'Hara was aware of the various aberrations that evolved from emotional and psychological needs and frustrations of the upper classes in the years 1900 to 1930. He was able to describe them in a concise and lucid fashion. If one wants to delve into the abhorent perversions and deviations of the time, or understand the emotional and psychological temperament of various individuals in this refined strata, one must turn to O'Hara's well-documented Pennsylvania novels.

These novels clearly captured the tempo of the times, and recorded the very essence of the upper class existence in Pennsylvania. They portrayed O'Hara's world not only with its genteel gloss, but they went beneath the surface to reveal its rather sordid side of failure, pessimism, perversion, suicide, alcoholism, and loneliness. O'Hara peered gently beneath the superficial surface to come up with the "stuff of life" and he exposed the utter despair of every upper class individual that he spoke about. With this despondency came psychological, emotional and physical turbulence. O'Hara perceived this sordid side with painful accuracy.

When it came to sex, it is well-known that O'Hara in his own life reported lurid, lucid details of sexual conduct in a rather observant fashion. In a letter to Pearce and Sloan, May 3rd, 1941, he described a supper party at the author Alex Waugh's house:

> ---he invited Mrs. O'Hara I as well as Mrs. O'Hara II, not to mention the curator of reptiles at the London Zoo, a Lesbian who loved Butterfield 8 and didn't know anything else I'd written, an illegitimate son of Oscar Wilde (!!!), a lady journalist and other interesting folk. Beebe would have loved it. I didn't. We went to someone's flat and the Lesbian asked all the girls to dance with her. Most of them did. Oh, and Mrs. ______, who wanted everybody to get drunk and start fucking.[59]

Matthew J. Bruccoli brought up the point that when O'Hara was questioned about his accuracy of his reportage of sexual conduct, he replied with the question "You don't notice much, do you?"[60] But, O'Hara always claimed that he recorded human behaviour as truthfully as he could. Perhaps, he followed Stephen Crane's advice:

> "... I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision - he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty.[61]

In the short story, "A Case History", a chronicle of a bad Gibbsville doctor, O'Hara gently summed up his view of the upper classes in Gibbsville, or Pottsville, Pennsylvania with a conversation between the doctor and Arthur McHenry (Joe Chapin's law partner):

> "Like that piece of tripe Dr. Malloy's son wrote a few years ago," said McHenry.
>
> "Oh, but that was a novel. Fiction. He made all that up".
>
> "But he certainly gave this town a black eye".
>
> "That's what I didn't understand, Arthur. If it was all made up, what are people so sore about?"
>
> "He gave the town a black eye, that's why. And not one damn thing he wrote about actually happened".

> "That's what I said. But you as a lawyer, and I as a physician, we know that things like them happened.
>
> "Oh, hell, as far as that goes, I know some things that if young Malloy ever heard about them...."
>
> "So do I, Arthur," said Dr. Drummond.[62]

Briefly, O'Hara reminded us in his acceptance speech in February, 1956 when he received the National Book Award for fiction that:

> "...since 1934 I have been publishing novels and books of short stories in which I told as honestly as I could what I have seen, heard, thought, and felt about a good many of the men and women who populate this country .... I have written so accurately and honestly that my overall contribution will have to be considered by future students of my time."[63]

In essence, John Henry O'Hara wrote with a Puritan conscience and portrayed the upper class with all its finery, and its propensity for having anguish in its remote background between 1900 and 1930 in Pennsylvania.[64]

With O'Hara's extraordinary insight into the very whims, desires, obsessions, and idiosyncrasies of the upper strata, we now have a glimpse at the "private hells" of the elite. His thorough knowledge and his ability to see and understand clearly the inner nature of the genteel has given us a rare glance at the astonishing sordid side of this class from anything from suicide, alcoholism, and perversion, to failure, pessimism, and loneliness. In general, his analysis of these various aberrations and idiosyncrasies were very well-defined. The only weaknesses that could be found were in the areas of prostitution and nymphomania. In both cases, his findings were rather vague. Nevertheless, O'Hara supported his case well that the upper strata who broke their severe moral codes had to suffer the dire consequences of their actions: having dashed hopes and horrendous disappointments awaiting them in their so-called refined lives. They could not escape their final doom. They, sooner or later, became destroyed. Hence, this genteel strata truly met its ultimate fate with O'Hara's uncanny prediction: an "Appointment in Samarra".

Footnotes

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3 Ibid., pp. 64, 70.

4 Ibid., p. 69.

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7 Carson, pp. 10-12.

8 Ibid., p. 12.

9 John O'Hara, Ten North Frederick, p. 9-10, cited by E. Russell Carson, The Fiction of John O'Hara (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), p. 8.

10 Carson, p. 9.

11 O'Hara, Ten North Frederick, p. 385.

12 Ibid., p. 395.

13 Carson, p. 47.

14 John O'Hara, Ourselves to Know (New York: Random House, 1960; reprint ed., New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 296.

15 Ibid., p. 337.

16 Ibid., p. 259.

17 John O'Hara, Appointment in Samarra (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934; reprint ed., New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1966), p. 76.

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23 John O'Hara, Lovey Childs: A Philadelphian's Story (New York: Random House, 1969; reprint ed., London, England: New English Library, 1972), pp. 55-56.

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25 Ibid., pp. 100-101.

26 Ibid., p. 136.

27 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

28 Ibid., p. 166.

29 Ibid., p. 170.

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31 Anon., review of Lovey Childs: A Philadelphian's Story, by John O'Hara, in New York Times (Lovey Childs: reprint ed., London, England: New English Library, 1972), cover.

32 O'Hara, Lovey Childs, p. 100.

33 O'Hara, Ourselves to Know, p. 163.

34 Ibid., p. 239.

35 Ibid., p. 276.

36 O'Hara, Ourselves to Know, pp. 276-277.

37 O'Hara, Ten North Frederick, p. 46.

38 Ibid., pp. 126-127.

39 Carson, p. 41.

40 John O'Hara, Ourselves To Know, p. 202, cited by E. Russell Carson, The Fiction of John O'Hara (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), p. 41.

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42 O'Hara, Ourselves to Know, p. 398.

43 O'Hara, Appointment in Samarra, p. 101.

44 Ibid., p. 102.

45 Ibid., p. 103.

46 John O'Hara, Butterfield 8 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934; reprint ed., New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1969), p. 110.

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48 Ibid., p. 119.

49 O'Hara, Ten North Frederick, p. 125.

50 O'Hara, Ourselves to Know, p. 155.

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60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., p. 359.

62 John O'Hara, "A Case History", Assembly (New York: Random House, 1961; reprint ed., New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1965), p. 371.

63 Bruccoli, O'Hara Concern, p. 240.

64 Ibid., p. 360.

# CHAPTER 5

## The Critics Comment About O'Hara

John Henry O'Hara, a social historian, portrayed the wealthy, ambitious, and socially powerful families of Eastern Pennsylvania with such a concentration that he was able to expose their very crassness and moral degeneration that pervaded their rigid upper crust between 1900 to 1930.[1] With bold and blunt realism, and "a considerable portion of accurate spade calling blended with some very keen character portrayal",[2] he was able to dissect the upper classes and bring to light their abominable idiosyncrasies. Not only were the country club set and the academic, political, business and religious circles examined in detail in O'Hara's novels, but the "possessions, success and family position in the timeless battle between the Arrived and the Climbing".[3] Within the preselected viewpoint of a social historian, O'Hara presented a slice of life, - "Americana, from civic affairs, to conjugal relations and the Social Code".[4] He provided us with "visual journalism rather than mental or emotional flight".[5] O'Hara was so exact that M.E.F. remarked:

> So when JOH writes about Lantenengo Street in Gibbsville, PA he writes about an American landmark, and everybody knows which street in each town is called Lantenengo, by another name perhaps.[6]

But, John Kenneth Galbraith in a facetious vein tended to feel that O'Hara's work which graphically described that: "--- social distinction depends on money, mileage to the Atlantic seaboard, schools, clubs, and above all, the discriminating possession of consumers goods" had no real interest to the reader. Galbraith thought that O'Hara would claim that: "In Gibbsville it would be Pepsodent and Scot Tissue and probably a Pierce-Arrow. Certainly Scot Tissue. Philly people are more particular...."[7]

And with this biting comment, Galbraith went on to exclaim that O'Hara may have had an ear for speech, but it served "no particular purpose". Galbraith continued to criticize in an acrid fashion:

> "Once or twice they give you all or most of the railway stations from Philadelphia by way of Reading to Gibbsville. In the next volume they are almost certain to recite all of the early Gibbsville telephone numbers. Some will argue that, as compared with much of the modern O'Hara, this has real interest. But I do not agree."[8]

Galbraith did not deny O'Hara's accuracy, but was overwhelmed by the abundance of minor accurate details. No matter what, O'Hara was able to dig deep into his obsession with the upper class and come up with a "social commentary of biting impact".[9]

O'Hara was able to contrive a story "of flawed humanity in a false world of status, money, and opportunism" in The Lockwood Concern.[10] Not only that, but, O'Hara gave a moral lesson which made the reader shudder:

> It is the futility of man's worship of the almighty dollar, which brings only material comfort, if that, and certainly not satisfaction of the soul. And it takes more than that to walk in the main line of any society as O'Hara deftly shows through the Lockwoods.[11]

At a lecture at the University of South Florida, in December, 1965, Henry Steele Commager listed three characteristics of the 20th Century American in The American Mind. They were announced as: "an obsession with keeping up with the Biddles, not the Joneses; with a vast palaver over sex" and, with juvenile delinquency".[12] All three characteristics were in The Lockwood Concern, and if one looked closer at the Pennsylvania novels, all were throughout them.[13] Consequently, John O'Hara's chronicles spoke about the modern American. But, Jeff Millar who writes for The Chronicle of Houston, Texas, realized that when O'Hara published The Lockwood Concern in 1965, he "reexamined American Society".[14] In a sense, O'Hara was redundant about his work. He had already chronicled the early twentieth century in his other novels.[15]

O'Hara's penchant for "scientific detachment and meticulous attention to detail" allowed him to document a century of American social history.[16] Even though O'Hara was recognized for his ---"sterling honesty, his clarity of vision, his brilliant delineation of character, his uncanny way of making you share in the experience of his men and women" and his quite informative writing style, he had been attacked for spiritual dishonesty by A.C. Greene, Book Editor of the Times Herald, Dallas, Texas.[17] Greene believed that: "As it is his novels all have the same false, flat ring to them because they are all convinced with the same problem and all arrive at a false answer".[18] Yet, on the whole, critics personally feel that Eastern Pennsylvania and American social history come alive in John O'Hara's novels.

O'Hara delved into pessimistic matters in The Lockwood Concern and put across to the reader that sexuality and acquisitiveness could not be the main goals in life. If so, the characters would pay the consequences. This insightful theme was prevalent throughout all his Pennsylvania novels.[19] Theodore M. O'Leary analyzed O'Hara's work with a "microscopic" eye for he knew what the other critics thought, but, he still astounded them with the statement:

> To tens of thousands of people John O'Hara writes dirty books. He doesn't. He writes books in which many of the characters misbehave sexually and succumb to materialism and he does not gloss over their misbehaviour and their pursuit of false values. But ultimately most of his characters pay for their affronts to morality and their misplaced faith. So O'Hara is in his way an unswerving moralist, fated to be regarded as a purveyor of obscenity by a great part of the public which buys his novels by the thousands largely for their superficial aspects rather than their underlying meanings.[20]

Not all critics could glorify and honour O'Hara and a writer who wrote in Time, December 3, 1965, was one of them. His rebuttal to the other reviewers and O'Hara was quite adamant, but, to my way of thinking, unsubstantiated:

> Any realistic story of the era includes the assault of the upwardly mobile upon the established rich. But, O'Hara's aspirants never make it. Like Scott Fitzgerald before him, O'Hara feels that there is something implacably defeating about the always-have-been-rich. But there isn't.----
>
> The upwardly mobile do make it. The rich are no longer exclusive. O'Hara is fighting a battle against the Establishment that the Establishment itself has long since quit fighting.
>
> If it is a social history (The Lockwood Concern) (which O'Hara insists he is writing), it seems no longer relevant. Reading O'Hara is beginning to take on something of the feeling of reading a Victorian novelist.[21]

With his first novel, Appointment in Samarra, critics were overwhelmed with O'Hara's uncanny accuracy. In fact, this book handled the American scene in the 1920's and 1930's so well that storytellers such as Katherine Brush and Dorothy Parker were calling it a masterpiece.[22] Its realistic approach conjured up statements such as "It's a grand book"; "For straight matter-of-factness, candid and incredulously outspoken frankness, this novel is not to be excelled".[23] Or, "Realism with a bang".[24] O'Hara crammed the Jazz Age and the beginning of the Great Depression into Appointment in Samarra with such bold realism, that the reader could only shudder.[25] But, a professional critic from the Gazette, Green Bay, Wisconsin made quite an expressive and derogative comment about O'Hara's work in 1934:

> John O'Hara's book is the type which, when superficially examined, is praised for its bold realism, while in truth it should be unmercifully condemned for its worthlessness.
>
> ---
>
> John O'Hara may have a future as an author if he can grow up mentally, out of the age of pauperish realism and negativism. In "Appointment in Samarra" he is still displaying a well-rounded collection of French post-cards with all the bravery of a bodyguarded gangster.[26]

Nevertheless, Herschell Brickell uttered "---a way of living he has described with undeniable accuracy". But, still a touch of negative comment followed: - The novel "leaves a lot to be desired". Not only did the professional reviewers take O'Hara's work to task, but laymen expressed their opinions about his work too. A reader wrote into Mr. Herschell Brickell at the Record in Philadelphia with a comment that summarized the public's feeling about O'Hara's writing:

> ---Gibbsville life, as he shows it, is an exact reproduction of the same sort of existence in any small town in the part of the country, of which he speaks.
>
> Mr. O'Hara has not exaggerated any item of the Club-set's interest or proclivities, but it takes the understanding and recognition of people living in similar communities to realize how well he has gotten under the skin and exposed the dull and dirty grey matter of this stratum.
>
> To me the book is tragically real. Tragically. And the principal tragedy is that club members of this sort will read it with smutty enjoyment and not realize that there is a lesson which their stupidity and blindness hides from them.
>
> I do not know Mr. O'Hara. I wish I did. I am amazed that he has the courage to tell the truth about a condition that exists.[27]

In his novel, Ten North Frederick, O'Hara carefully examined the aristocrat, Joseph Chapin's life from the time of his birth in the 1880's to his death in 1945. O'Hara was so insightful that he recorded the passing of a dominant political and social 19th Century elite - an elite that had unthinkable secrets; an elite which contained "a cold and formal honour which on closer examination turned out to be merely a cold and formal pride".[28]

O'Hara painted a portrait of the period in such a varied and rich fashion that Harold C. Gardiner expressed:

> ---He has just about all he needs to capture and record an age and an area: customs, nuances of speech, the slang of a period, the atmosphere of a time and place. His dialogue is crisp; his descriptions functional. In the role of novelist - as - photographer he probably has no peer among contemporary U.S. craftsman.
>
> But that, I firmly maintain, is all that can be said. Judged as a novelist - as - interpreter, he has nothing to say or, rather, much to say that adds up to nothing more than a sociological case-study.[29]

But, O'Hara assessed Gibbsville with his tape-recorder ear, a headwaiter's instinct for credit rating and his uncanny insight for determining different means of making love which "if supported by one of the great foundations, could put Dr. Kinsey right back among the gall wasps".[30] He could not know more. He must have referred to an encyclopedia when he spoke about a subject for O'Hara never made an error politically, socially, historically, sexually, or otherwise. Ten North Frederick certainly can serve as a reference book for sociology and history, as well as its intended literary function. After reading this book, "you have lived truly in a certain time, and place, and intimately among its people".[31]

In fact, O'Hara was so accurate in Ten North Frederick that the critic Lewis Nichols emphatically stated:

> In conversation Mr. O'Hara has a tendency to use the names interchangeably speaking of some incident of boyhood, he can mention Gibbsville, then correct to Pottsville. Speaking of "10 North Frederick" the name of his new novel as well as a thoroughfare in Gibbsville, he can inadvertently call it by its Pottsville name.
>
> "Gibbsville is my Yoknapatawpha County;" he remarked. "The physical design is that of Pottsville, as it exists ---- But what it amounts to is that I've just taken a real town and made it conform to a novelist's idea".[32]

O'Hara was able to clearly depict the frustrations, idiosyncrasies and sexual hypocrisy amongst the upper class in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. When he did this, he made certain that he documented his accusations with data "showing where, when and in whose bedroom the social facade [was] rendered false".[33] O'Hara went so far in his observation that not only was he known as another "John P. Marquand, both as a masterful writer and as an observer and chronicler", but as the "Proust of Gibbsville" producing "a social analysis of a small Pennsylvania City".[34]

Josephine Braden of The Journal Courier, Louisville, Kentucky observed that O'Hara had written a shocking exposé of Pottsville, Pennsylvania. With extreme realism, O'Hara had exposed an entire social system and its secrets. Ten North Frederick was "rather like a bomb dropped on an enemy town: the outer walls of an alien dwelling [were] ripped off to reveal all the pitiful contrivances of private life within". With such exposure by O'Hara, Gibbsville "[had] become a real symbol of American middle-class [and upper class] life as we know it to-day".[35]

We know that O'Hara drew his people well and understood the secret motives, and the make-up of his various characters in an intimate yet objective way.[36] He was similar to a statistician with his x-ray eyes and his objective mind in Ten North Frederick:

> Like "A Rage to Live", this one takes the town apart again, as O'Hara investigates upper-class manners and morals, social, sexual and political stresses and hedonistic self-righteousness.
>
> Again, as in "A Rage to Live", this one is more a statistician's report on what is found under the roofs and bedclothes of a second-class town rather than an analysis.
>
> In surveying some 50 years of Gibbsville, O'Hara draws characters so real they

> may make readers squirm. Characters talk politely about weddings, funerals, assemblies and rare crimes involving members of the elite, then turn around to jungle tactics to satisfy primitive appetites or short out their way to second-rate goals.
>
> ---In hating it (Pottsville) out loud, O'Hara has not written a memorable novel. Rather, as in "A Rage to Live", he channels this heroic contempt for his old home town into beautifully disciplined dirty remarks scrawled on the back fences of this representative area of contemporary American life.[37]

The sexual scenes in Ten North Frederick were so shocking and real that one wondered about O'Hara's obsession with sex. Sometimes, the realism became just "bad taste" and the honesty "plain vulgarity".[38] But, a critic from the Blade, Toledo, Ohio went far beyond this statement:

> "Ten North Frederick" has been truly called total dissection, social history, discerning truth, thoroughly convincing. But to some readers it will simply be the novel that reports more than they want to know about anyone, themselves included.[39]

T.C. from Binghamton Press concluded:

> ---The atmosphere of Gibbsville is so strong, it can be felt and smelled.
>
> Perhaps this comment is not too valid because we've already felt that whatever O'Hara did was right, but: In "Ten North Frederick" he has shown his hand is steady and his historian's sense for small-town generative processes is even sharper than of yore.[40]

In Ten North Frederick, O'Hara defined the Pennsylvanians' social standards and codes that governed them and, at the same time, realized their flaws that brought them tragic circumstances.[41] To be sure, not all comments about Ten North Frederick had been positive. Even though O'Hara had a book which was considered a sociological history of a town, his continual obsession with sex offended people and allowed "no good to come out of this - not for the characters, nor for the author's book".[42]

To some critics, this blockbuster of a book did not have any imagination or sympathy in it.[43] Others complained of its lack of substance and direction.[44] While still others realized O'Hara painted a clear picture of Gibbsville, but he always stressed the weaknesses, and moral defects of his so-called charming characters. People tended to disagree with his low opinion of Gibbsvillians.[45]

No one can deny that O'Hara writes with accuracy. In fact, his accuracy was so acute that W.D.B. of the Post of Houston, Texas concluded that O'Hara "dissects small-town Pennsylvania so well that its findings may be transplanted anywhere in America": "For Gibbsville is America, and if you don't watch out you'll be transplanting it to

Crockett or Brenham or Georgetown. It transplants well".[46]

No matter if the criticism was positive or negative, Lewis Gannett, a professional writer, for a Book Review column reviewed O'Hara's work in Ten North Frederick in a very decisive manner:

> Mr. O'Hara is a pattern weaver and a clinician. His picture of the niceties of the caste system in Gibbsville has a sociological precision seldom present in sociologist's books. He never falters in fitting language to a person, though squeamish readers may sometimes wish he had. His understanding of the techniques by which Mike Slattery obtained and exercised political power insights is shrewd beyond the textbooks of politics, and he does for Mike what he does for few of his characters - he makes the reader love him, --- In any case, you never doubt the observed accuracy of the male portraits in the O'Hara gallery. --- superb social historian. Those who accept Scott Fitzgerald as the man who understood the 1920's would do better to study Mr. O'Hara. His characters of the 20's "were not aware that they were living in an Age; a Jazz Age, or an Age of Lost Innocence; they took some pride in living in the twentieth century".[47]

John O'Hara "the grand old man of realism" was able to grasp the very essence of Lyons, Pennsylvania (Lykens) in his novel Ourselves to Know. With "painstaking, acute social documentation", he put "a seal on his extraordinary knowledge of the social topography of small-town Pennsylvania". With his "compelling sense of how the present issues from the past", he "[laid] bare, with stunning accuracy, the fabric of society".[48]

With O'Hara's power of "total recall", Marsh Maslin of the San Francisco News - Call Bulletin blatantly claimed that "no other American novelist can re-create our past - all the customs and folkways of our medium-sized towns - as John O'Hara can". I tend to agree.[49] With rich detail, in Ourselves to Know, O'Hara turned the ordinary into the extraordinary and made his historical delvings "always relevant, always controlled, [and] always interesting". Thus, --- "It's too important and real to degrade it".[50]

A critic of The Sun Times, Chicago, Illinois reported:

> It Isn't Enough to say of John O'Hara that he is a great social historian. This, however, is praise of the first order and fully merited by the author of "Ourselves to Know". The novel shuttles back and forth between the closing years of the last century and the early years of this, with a knowledge of and a feeling for the period that any professional historian would be proud to call his own. Here we see Pennsylvania - the O'Hara Pennsylvania of several earlier novels - in the years of its stabilization and expansion, with the growth of conflicting classes, aristocratic, proletarian and middle. The vista extends to the 1920's of flaming youth and the lost generation but with this sharply observed reservation - the youth of the time were unaware of their flames and their rootlessness. It was always somebody else people were criticizing for wild, pointless rebellion and order. O'Hara always knows his time, his place and his people.[51]

Even though O'Hara knew the modes, customs and the native scene of the beginning of the century, he "inevitably [pried] up the lid to lay bare some new naughty trick man and woman to-gether [had] sinfully hatched up".[52] He presented "a bleak and desperate vision of life's emptiness and moral anarchy" in Lyons (Lykens), Pennsylvania. Millhouser, who epitomized all that was viable in upper class America, succumbed to his own weaknesses of lust, and sex and in the end became a murderer.[53]

Charles A. Brady of The New York Evening News questioned O'Hara's recognized "trademarks of massively meticulous social detail and clean-tooled naturalistic prose". He wondered "Can IT BE THAT, because the author's historical perspective must stretch back further even than the field of Gettysburg, a certain piety, where an older America is in question here inhibits this unpleasant speciality of his"?[54]

Some critics could not follow O'Hara's logic. How could Millhouser, the boy, banker and businessman become Millhouser the murderer?[55] All in all, O'Hara has recorded a segment of our history in a finical manner in this novel. John Chamberlain assessed O'Hara in a conclusive fashion: He realized O'Hara could "miraculously recreate social settings, social attitudes and social atmosphere" as no other individual could. As John Chamberlain expressed it:

> The End - the discovery of self in the knowledge that the formulas, the tribulations and the betrayals of life are endlessly repeated - is the work of a master. Furthermore, it's the work of a master named John O'Hara. Nobody else could have managed it.[56]

In the novel From the Terrace, O'Hara had such penetrating insight into the wealth and destruction of the American scene that he was marked as "an author of major individual distinction".[57] He examined "the successes and failures of the moneyed class" in quite a brutal fashion and his contempt for their social codes in their "tight little world of their own" cropped up throughout his writing.[58] O'Hara as a social historian created an "Inquiry into Wealth" and "chart[ed] the reality of the situation".[59] He presented --- "a detailed and interesting psychological study of wealth in the first half of the twentieth century --- furnished with a plethora of explicit sexual episodes and numerous coarse impressions".[60]

Robert R. Kirsch, Book Editor of The Times, Los Angeles, felt that From the Terrace represented:

> a blending of the social and psychological novel which is one of O'Hara's most

> important contributions to 20th century fiction. No one will quibble with describing O'Hara as a social novelist, a chronicler of periods and places, of classes and types. But he goes beyond this to study the interplay of individual and group, of the single man and society.
>
> --- he has both reflected his times and captured the universal, the unique individual for the generations to come. In this sense From the Terrace is a magnificent piece of work and I predict it will endure.[61]

The New York Tribune commented in a postive manner about From the Terrace:

> --- But while you will observe that they represent a dead honest writer's vision of the world as he sees it, that the detail is a by-product of an abundance of knowledge of American life that few of his contemporaries share. He is a social historian and an artist, but an artist first of all. It doesn't happen often and when it does the result is a major achievement.[62]

One certainly can have faith in John O'Hara's documentation of American life in the first half of the twentieth century:

> When he writes "Fritz Thornton drove his nephew and Alfred to the new Pennsylvania Station in his Crane-Simplex," one has no doubt that the Pennsylvania Station was new in 1916 and that there was an automobile known as the Crane-Simplex.[63]

When he wrote From the Terrace, O'Hara was in contact with bankers, lawyers, navy men and flyers to confirm his data. O'Hara admitted in an interview that:

> It's the best thing I've done. The scope of it - fifty years of our country's most exciting history - is larger than anything I've tried before. Writing this novel demanded more wisdom, more patience, more craft, all of which comes from growing older----[64]

We know that John O'Hara was "perhaps the U.S.'s chief social embalmer of manners and morals among the moneyed". O'Hara was a social historian that:

> continues to describe the nuances of social habit with rare authority in a society in which social flux continuously alters the symbols of prestige. But the snobbism of the right prep school, the right club, the right street, in the right exurb becomes so intrusive that Terrace often reads like a gigantic menu.[65]

It is without hesitation that O'Hara may be denoted as an historian for his novels, especially From the Terrace, recorded American manners and mores in quite a detailed fashion.[66] At one point, his biographer, Matthew J. Bruccoli claimed that O'Hara was "below par" as a social historian:

> ---Indeed, it once seemed that the social historians of the twenty-third century would find their best source material in John O'Hara's work. But From the Terrace raises disquieting doubts. The labels are still in the right suits, and the suits are still on the right people - that much is okay. However, it is impossible not to challenge the veracity of the veneral antics depicted in this novel. If this stuff is true, then perhaps it might be well for New York, New Jersey, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware to patrol their frontiers.[67]

But, Bruccoli retracted his negative statement with a reappraisal published on March 18, 1959:

> Mr. O'Hara is the best reporter in our literature, which is to say that he uses real detail to convey life. Few - precious few - writers have the saavy and skill to do this.
>
> ---Whatever else is wrong with "From the Terrace" the documenting is right. If this doesn't seem like much, then just try to prepare a list of novels written during the past decade that have verisimilitude.[68]

Some critics have felt that this novel was a failure for it included trivial details that could be uninteresting to the reader. For example, he "catalogu[ed] in full the food and wines served at a dinner in a banker's house" or, he described Armistice Day, 1918 from dawn to dusk in Port Johnson. But even though he cluttered this novel with detail, his sense of history

> is not unlimited - it is restricted, mostly, to the slice of life of history he has himself lived through - but it comes out in a genuine interest, an acute perception of how one age develops out of another and how survivals from one period can remain active into the next, hampering and yet enriching it.

Essentially, John Henry O'Hara covered American history in the first half of the twentieth century and graphically reported "the economy and demography of his native town".[69] He made his people real, but, at times, failed to make them truly significant.[70] As Charles Rolo from The Atlantic demonstrated, "You cannot create a living world by cataloguing its contents".[71]

Overall, O'Hara "[was] fascinated by the American social comedy in this century - morals, manners, social prestige, power and the influence of power".[72] But, a critic was quick to point out that From the Terrace:

> As a novel of manners describing the characteristics of a particular aristocratic class centred around New York, Boston and Philadelphia, his story is a minor masterpiece. On the level of discussion of the meaning of life in that aristocractic class in the twentieth century, where many previously accepted standards of conduct have been abandoned, Mr. O'Hara's analysis has a certain shallowness which stems from his inordinate preoccupation with sex, money and the external fittings of life among the rich. If he means to mirror the futility of a life whose goals have been alternatively love and money, he may have succeeded too well.[73]

Nevertheless,

> ---one cannot deny his superb craftsmanship, his eye for human weakness, his amazing ear for American speech and his power to create engaging characters like Alfred Eaton, the hero of 'From the Terrace'.
>
> ---Far be it for John O'Hara to displease the public.[74]

John O'Hara was a noted social historian and a prolific writer. If one wants to learn about the first half of the twentieth century, and what one bought at Asprey's or Cartier's, or which automobile one drove at the beginning of the 1900's, all one has to do is turn to From the Terrace, and it "tells it all".

In essence, From the Terrace was an historical document about life in Pennsylvania from 1894 to 1946 amongst the upper classes. It truly painted on canvas the refinement and the crassness of this strata. It portrayed O'Hara's view of the rich in a very impressive manner. O'Hara ultimately became another Proust or Marquand - consequently, he became a social historian--an expert on upper class life in Pennsylvania.

Mo matter which O'Hara novel a critic examines, he will allude either indirectly or directly to its historical authenticity. O'Hara was able to grasp the very essence of the upper class in America from 1900 to 1930 and express to his readers its genteel side and its outright tawdriness. He peered into this upper class group and found their idiosyncrasies of failure, pessimism, alcoholism, perversion, suicide and loneliness. O'Hara, even though he was part of the same group, did not shirk from his duties: he called a spade a spade. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his methodology and his use of obscene words is not the question. He purportedly gave a glimpse of the truth during the era that he lived. He reported as honestly as he could. He attempted to put down on paper his view of the upper class in America. Whether we like his perception or not is insignificant.

He wrote about what he saw. He took his reader on a journey of American history from 1900 to 1930 in quite a thorough fashion. He observed the rich in all forms of life and addressed each appropriately. Whether he discussed the sex life of Hedda Millhouser or Gloria Wandrous or Julian English, he analyzed it in an objective manner. His reporter days benefited him. Any slice of life was looked at in a clear, and concise way. O'Hara did not mince his words. He spoke as he saw it.

O'Hara's acute observation has given America a solid look at the upper classes between 1900 and 1930. If one wants a lesson on the geographical, social or historical setting of Pottsville, Pennsylvania and surrounding vicinity, or a glimpse at the manners, mores, fashion, educational, economical, political, religious and familial aspects of the upper class or the psychological and emotional sides of it, or the idiosyncrasies of the wealthy, turn to O'Hara. He has carefully designated the upper class's place in American history. He has carved its niche so nicely that historians must look at his work on the twentieth century. To disregard O'Hara would be desecrating America's cultural heritage. A statement in the beginning of O'Hara's book Sweet and Sour summarizes the majority's view about O'Hara:

> If future historians want to know what it was like to live in America in the twentieth century they would do well to read John O'Hara. For our supreme storyteller has recorded the American scene with an accuracy and artistry that captures each moment and emotion eternally on the printed page.[75]

John Henry O'Hara portrayed Pennsylvania's upper classes of the early twentieth century so well that he was basically ostracized from his hometown, Pottsville, Pennsylvania after his publication of Appointment in Samarra in 1934 until the 1980's. No one wanted to discuss his most famous novel or even associate with this man whose colleagues were John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, and Scott Fitzgerald. Even though O'Hara recorded America's history in an honest way - as he actually saw it, he truly lived his own "private hell" and had horrendous disappointments after his shocking exposé of his native town. Ultimately, he, too, had his "Appointment in Samarra".

All reviews are filed in the John O'Hara Files at Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania.

Footnotes

1 A. Ranger Tyler, review of Appointment in Samarra, by John O'Hara, in Knickerbocker Press (Albany, New York), 26 August 1934.

2 Ibid.

3 James Kelley, review of Ten North Frederick, by John O'Hara, in Saturday Review, 26 November 1955.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 M.E.F., review of Appointment in Samarra, by John O'Hara, in Times-Union, 9 September 1934.

7 John Kenneth Galbraith, review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Washington Post Book Week, 28 November 1965.

8 Ibid.

9 Anon., review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Times Herald (Vallejo, California), 5 December 1965.

10 Ibid.

11 Virgil Miller Newton Jr., review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Tampa Tribune, 9 January 1966.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Jeff Millar, review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Chronicle (Houston, Texas), 2 January 1966.

15 Ibid.

16 Jerry Coffey, review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Star (Fort Worth, Texas), 28 November 1965.

17 Mae A. Conklin, review of Appointment in Samarra, by John O'Hara, in Register (New Haven, Connecticut), 23 September 1934; A.C. Greene, review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Times Herald (Dallas, Texas) November 1965.

18 A.C. Greene, review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Times Herald (Dallas, Texas), November 1965.

19 Theodore M. O'Leary, review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Star (Kansas City, Kansas), 28 November 1965.

20 Ibid.

21 Anon., review of The Lockwood Concern, by John O'Hara, in Time, 3 December 1965.

22 Anon., review of Appointment in Samarra, by John O'Hara, in Star Eagle (Newark, New Jersey), 25 August 1934.

23 Anon., review of Appointment in Samarra, by John O'Hara, in Call (Allentown, Pennsylvania), 19 August 1934.

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## Conclusion

John Henry O'Hara with his photographic eye and tape recorder ear recorded an authentic picture of early 20th century America. His uncanny sense of perception and an ear for dialogue captured a slice of life and presented a colourful tableau of the upper strata in Pennsylvania. On the whole, the critics feel that O'Hara peered beneath the genteel gloss of the upper classes in Pennsylvania and came up with a shocking side that no one dared to believe. If O'Hara was challenged on his particular view, his ire was raised for he truly believed that the average individual lacked insight into human nature. Nevertheless, O'Hara dissected the upper classes in Pottsville, Pennsylvania and surrounding vicinity to the degree that he touched upon problems that were only felt to be in the lower classes. Perversion, pessimism, suicide, alcoholism, and loneliness emerged out of a tightly-knit silky cocoon of utter refinement.

In his analysis, O'Hara did not use rose-coloured glasses. He wrote as he saw it. Hence, the genteel image of the upper class was destroyed in Pottsville, Pennsylvania and consequently for America too. He wrote about his native town as if he had placed it under a microscope: He saw its virtues, but beneath its finery O'Hara recognized the ugliness and vulgarity that made up its existence.

In his youth, O'Hara could not accept Pottsville, Pennsylvania and all that it entailed. He was aware of its tightly-knit class system. He knew that he - a middle-class Catholic - could never reach the higher heights of Mahantongo Street. 125 and 606 was as far as he would go. He had a lot to prove. Not only was he a middle-class Catholic, but his bouts of intoxication and his endless line of jobs did not help his image. After his father's death (Dr. Patrick O'Hara) in 1925, his genteel poverty put him into another category of class distinction altogether. He longed to be "somebody". This longing spurred him on to New York and professional journalism. He wanted to seek his own "niche" in society.[1]

There is no question about it. O'Hara had to separate himself from his environment if he wanted to be a success. He had to sever his connection with Pottsville. To do this, O'Hara released his feelings of bitterness and hatred towards his hometown in a letter in Spring, 1935 to Walter S. Farquhar:

> If you're going to get out of that God awful town, for God's sake write something that will *make* you get out of it. Write something that automatically will sever your connection with the town, that will help you get rid of the

> bitterness you must have stored up against all those patronizing cheap bastards in that dry-fucked excrescence on Sharp Mountain. Stick it out for another year, but in that year go home at night knowing that you've done a thousand words a day toward showing them what you really think of them. You don't love them, any more than I do. You couldn't. You are a snob, but a snob not the way Ed Luther is, but the way I am. The Ed Luther kind can be bought - and lost in Wall Street. I was a snob when I was starving on 43rd Street. I give you the Sheafer Estate. I give you the Bannons, Weinkoops, Thompsons, DeFrehns, Halberstadts, Beddalls, Brighams - go to it, boy. But I warn you, the Atkinses won't ask you to their tea dance next Christmas.[2]

But, years later, (December, 1967) when O'Hara realized that he was just as lonely and isolated in New York, Princeton, or Hollywood, he reconciled his differences with elitist Pottsville:

> In December I went back to Pottsville to a party which was attended by the people I have known all my life, in a club where my father once lived, on a street where I was born. For the first time since 1927, when I left Pottsville, I had a good time there, recalling people's middle names and old sweethearts and so on. On our way back to Princeton I said to Sister that I enjoyed the feeling of rediscovering my roots, indeed of really discovering them for the first time. At twenty-two I was too young to have anything but roots; at sixty-two the tree that I had become (I fancy myself as a sturdy oak type) was something more than a stick pushed haphazardly into the ground. I have no intention of moving back to Pottsville; we are settled here; but it is nice to know that 130 miles away I have roots some of which were planted two centuries ago.[3]

Hence, Pottsville became his beloved hometown.

In some ways, Pottsville has shown its appreciation of John Henry O'Hara. June 19, 1982 was proclaimed as "John O'Hara Day". On that day, an historical plaque was put in front of his home at 606 Mahantongo Street:

> This was the home, from 1916 to 1928, of one of America's best known novelists and short-story writers. Born at Pottsville in 1905 he used this anthracite region as a setting for several of his major works. O'Hara died at Princeton, N.J. in 1970.[4]

But still lingering in the minds of Pottsvillians are feelings of utter resentment and hatred for O'Hara's shocking exposé in his publication of Appointment in Samarra in 1934. This was exemplified by naming a street after him in a lower-class district. We realize that the resentment between O'Hara and the town was so real that it is only now after fifty years they dare utter his name. Yet I was able to gather quite an insightful statement from an anonymous Pottsville old-timer with a twinkle in his eye: "O'Hara didn't tell it all". The story set down by John O'Hara could have been harsher. Today, it has mellowed with time. We have ultimately come to the conclusion that O'Hara accurately described his beloved Pottsville and surrounding area in geographical, social and historical terms in his Pennsylvania novels.

Within the geographic framework that stretched from Philadelphia at its eastern extremity to Harrisburg at its western end, and then to Pottsville, Tamaqua and Lykens at its northern point, O'Hara told his tales of the upper classes that either disgusted or excited the reader. Whether it be the murder of Hedda Millhouser or the nymphomania of Ann Chapin or the alcoholism of Julian English or Joe Chapin, O'Hara was so explicit about the upper classes' proclivities that he cracked their thin veneer. The silver-backed brushes, gold collar pins, or Pierce Arrows held no charm any longer. O'Hara looked beneath the superficial surface from badges, organizations, fashion, taste to family background to expose the pastimes of the rich. He discovered that the idiosyncrasies of the wealthy were numerous but wrought with emptiness, loneliness, desolation, futility, frustration, failure and pessimism. The rich were engaged in a private torment and consequently had blighted hopes. Their ultimate fate could only be an "Appointment in Samarra".

The social pressures exerted upon the rich caused a malfunctioning on their part. Abnormalities emerged that jolted the ordinary man. No matter which example one looks at in O'Hara's work, one can only find weaknesses beneath the refined exterior. O'Hara was obsessed with expressing the reality of the upper classes. Even though he was one of them, he still wished to expose them for what they were. Instead of presenting this strata in a rather tasteful fashion, he unravelled the "silk cocoon" and revealed its inner contents. He unveiled its quirks of perversion, alcoholism, and suicide, along with its feelings of failure, pessimism, and loneliness. He related to the reader the rich's suffering, and then quietly disclosed that "the aristocracy has no future".[5]

The rules, the conduct, the protocol and the manners no longer hid the frustrations, quirks and idiosyncrasies of the upper class. The external pressures completely eroded its cover to bring to light the disappointments of the rich. Consequently, O'Hara knew that the wealthy would have an end as Somerset Maugham predicted. Once the trappings were removed, the rich had no hope or salvation. They were bound to succumb to failure in every sense of the word.[6]

O'Hara has taken such a close look at the upper classes between 1900 and 1930 that present day historians must evaluate his work. O'Hara's novels can no longer be ignored by the History Faculties on campuses across America. They must be closely examined and then possibly reflected upon. O'Hara clearly "chart[ed] the reality of the upper classes" in the first half of the twentieth century.[7] Whether he studied their idiosyncrasies or their well-mannered genteel side, his view was portrayed in a clear-cut fashion. He left none of his extraordinary insight out. He recorded what he saw, felt and thought. He was afraid of no one. He gladly wrote what he honestly saw. If one wants to understand this genteel set of Pennsylvania between 1900 to 1930, one has to read O'Hara. Otherwise, an incomplete view of this class in Pennsylvania would be the consequence.

O'Hara's friend, Al Wright believed that O'Hara truly loved the era "from the first shot at Sumter to the scene on the deck of the Missouri". This is obvious for O'Hara recorded as well as he could that brief era in history. Al Wright noted his impression of O'Hara and O'Hara's world with this comment:

> Thoughts of John are always coming back to me in a thousand ways, perhaps because I am not yet used to the idea that he is dead. I frequently stay at the Yale Club when I'm in the city, and I get hung up for long periods in the hallways looking at all those photographs of the 1895 crew or the 1907 golf team or the Yale Battery of World War One. And immediately I think of John. That was the world he really loved - and lived in, or tried to. I don't think John gave a damn about anything that happened after World War Two. His era was that 85 years from the first shot at Sumter to the scene on the deck of the Missouri. You can leave out the rest of the history of the world. But if some guy with radar ears and eyes on the ends of three-foot antennae a couple of hundred years from now wants to know how people acted in that brief period - what they ate and said and thought - he had better read O'Hara.[8]

O'Hara had the uncanny insight to peer into the upper classes' minds and to understand why they deviated from their conventional niches, and even to comprehend their quirks and idiosyncrasies. In other words, O'Hara left out nothing in his view of the rich. His was a total picture of the upper classes in Pennsylvania in the early part of the century. Possibly Joseph Conrad's credo sums up O'Hara's work well:

> My task, which I am trying to achieve, is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel. It is, before all, to make you see. That - and no more.[9]

It is obvious that O'Hara has taken a slice of life and carefully defined it. His incredible insight has helped create a scene so vivid that critics have compared him to John P. Marquand and Marcel Proust. No wonder Thomas P. Coakley asserted that O'Hara was The Region's "artist - its priest and philosoph" who---

> sees with his soul as well as his eyes, and this double perspective allows him to penetrate beneath the hideousness of the surface, to see the human warmth, and suffering, and heroism that have made this tragic place a place apart, a place he may wish to escape with all his heart, but a place which will always be his home.[10]

O'Hara defined The Region and the upper classes so well in his novels that Professor Matthew Bruccoli found:

> O'Hara's fictional Region and its real-life counterpart to share the same 'tone or feel' and Bernard McCormick who, in visiting The Region, had the 'weird sensation' of seeing and hearing in the life around him 'the rhythms of John O'Hara' -- as well as in the testimony of present day citizens of The Region who refer those who wish to comprehend its 'sense of place' to the works of John O'Hara.[11]

As a consequence, The Region has been named 'O'Hara Country' for The Region's people say "O'Hara did for the Region".[12]

John Henry O'Hara defined The Region and the people within it so satisfactorily that historians must take a look at his work. For, to not do so, would be to omit an essential part of the American cultural and historical heritage. O'Hara's view of the upper classes may not meet everyone's approval; but it is a vision - a vision of a man - who sought the truth. For this, no one can scorn him. And if one can bear the use of obscenities and, at times, long-winded passages within his literature, and burrow beneath this surface, one can truly see a record of the upper classes in Pennsylvania between 1900 and 1930. His biographer Matthew Bruccoli agrees:

> "For forty years he wrote truthfully and exactly about life and people, scorning fashion, to produce a body of work unsurpassed in American literature in scope and fidelity to American life."----[13]

For this fact, alone, O'Hara can be denoted a social historian. John Henry O'Hara's words tell it best of all:

> I saw and felt and heard the world around me and within my limitations and within my prejudices I wrote down what I saw and felt and heard. I tried to keep it mine and where I was most successful it was mine.[14]

It is obvious that O'Hara had some limitations, particularly in the areas of prostitution and nymphomania. His lack of insight and knowledge about these two diversions in the upper classes was quite apparent. But, O'Hara admitted that he could only write about what was in his own experience. He could not elaborate further. As suggested previously, "Were the topics too close to home?" Did his prejudices influence his writing about these key aspects of the upper strata? We will never know. No matter what, it can be conclusively said that O'Hara still exposed "the other side" of the gentility in Pennsylvania. His vision and reality of the upper class strata in Pennsylvania between 1900 and 1930 were one. O'Hara brought to the public and the historian's eye the view that the rich did have their "private hells" and disappointments which included failure, pessimism, perversion, suicide, alcoholism, and loneliness, and, sooner or later, an "Appointment in Samarra".[15] This must not be overlooked, for it is only now that we have a total and true portrait of this genteel class in Pennsylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. As John Henry O'Hara profoundly stated,

> --- In middle age I was proud to have lived according to my emotions at the right time, and content to live that way vicariously and at a distance. I had missed almost nothing, escaped very little, and at fifty I had begun to devote my energy and time to the last, simple but big task of putting it all down as well as I knew how.[16]

Truly, O'Hara was a spokesman for his age.

## Footnotes

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2 John O'Hara, Selected Letters of John O'Hara, ed., Matthew Joseph Bruccoli (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 106.

3 Selected Letters of John O'Hara, ed., Matthew Joseph Bruccoli, pp. 507-508, cited by Matthew Joseph Bruccoli, The O'Hara Concern: A Biography of John O'Hara (New York: Random House, 1975; reprint ed., Toronto, Ont.: Popular Library, 1977), p. 343.

4 Coakley, p. 155.

5 Frank MacShane, The Life of John O'Hara (New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1980), p. 225.

6 E. Russell Carson, The Fiction of John O'Hara (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), p. 9.

7 H.A.W., review of From the Terrace, by John O'Hara, in Times (Trenton, New Jersey), 30 November 1958, John O'Hara Files, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania.

8 Finis Farr, O'Hara: A Biography, British edition (London: W.H. Allen, 1974), p. 188.

9 Introduction to The Nigger of the Narcissus, cited by Matthew J. Bruccoli, in The O'Hara Concern: A Biography of John O'Hara (Toronto: Popular Library, 1977), p. 250.

10 Coakley, pp. 3; 60.

11 Ibid., p. 24.

12 Ibid., p. 28.

13 Bruccoli, O'Hara Concern, p. 360.

14 Ibid.

15 Carson, p. 70.

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